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ABSTRACT

The Mass Media Effects section of this collection of conference presentations contains the following 13 papers: "The Nature of the Public's Objections to Television Programs: An Examination of Third-Person Effects" (Guy E. Lometti and others); "An Examination of the Relationship of Structural Pluralism, News Role and Source Use with Framing in the Context of a Community Controversy" (Cynthia-Lou Coleman); "Covering Xenophobia: Mass Media and the 'Holocaust Denial' Controversy" (Allen W. Palmer and D. Jeffrey Welch); 'The Third-Person Effect and Social Distance: Exploring Who are the 'Others'" (Joan Conners); "'Omigoditsthebigone!'": Uses of an Electronic Bulletin Board (EBB) Following the Great Quake of 1994" (Maryl Neff and James A. Karrh); "Influences on Reporters' Use of Sources at High Circulation U.S. Newspapers" (Angela Powers and Frederick Fico); "The Audience Objections Index: A Measure of TV Viewer Tolerance of Entertainment Gatekeeping" (James D. Kelly and Larry Collette); "Tragedy on Bayou Canot!: Newspaper Coverage of the Wreck of Amtrak's Sunset Limited" (Ana C. Garner and W. A. Kelly Huff); "Toward a Working Theory of Representations of Tolerance and Intolerance in the Press" (Catherine A. Steele); "The Effectiveness of Simple and Stratified Random Sampling in Broadcast News Content Analysis" (Daniel Riffe and others); "Race as a Variable in the Agenda-Setting Process" (Wayne Wanta and Randy Miller); "News of Hurricane Andrew: The Agenda of Sources and the Sources' Agenda" (Michael B. Salwen); and "Being Informed and Feeling Informed: The 'Assurance Function' of the Mass Media" (Michael B. Salwen and Paul Driscoll). (NKA)

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION IN JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

(77th, Atlanta, Georgia, August 10-13, 1994).

Part VI: Mass Media Effects

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The Nature of the Public's Objections to Television Programs: An Examination of Third-Person Effects

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Atlanta, August, 1994.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research summarized in this paper was to understand the extent to which the public finds different television programs and specific elements within programs to be personally unacceptable. In addition to understanding who objects to these depictions, finding out why they felt that way and examining those factors that may mediate viewers' levels of unacceptability were goals of this study. Within this context the research also tested the "third-person hypothesis". That is, will the concern people have about television's effects on others be a major reason why they may want to censor tv content?

For years there has been a concern among the general public, scholars and professionals in the field of television about the effects sexually or violently explicit material on television has on viewers' attitudes and behaviors. Sometimes public perceptions about television content are used to substantiate concerns about program impact and calls to control program content. Organized protest groups, primarily made up of Fundamentalist Christians (Montgomery 1989), frequently refer to the results of the common poll which asks viewers whether they agree with the statement "There is too much sex and/or violence on television." Invariably, the results tend to represent overwhelming agreement with the above sentiment.

Recently the interpretation of such public opinion data has been the subject of scholarly criticism (Gunter & Stipp, 1992; Stipp & Lometti, 1991). Questions like, "Is there too much sex and/or violence on television," tend to encourage socially desirable responses, as well as oversimplify the concept of sex and violence in television content. Questions of this type are biased in that they leave no room for an alternative response (Stipp & Lometti, 1991). Furthermore, these "socially acceptable" responses do not appear to be related to actual television viewing behavior (Stipp & Lometti, 1991). The overwhelming majority of people continue to watch individual television programs despite having said that "There is too much sex and violence on television".

When questions about the level of sex and violence in individual programs are asked, most respondents fail to indicate that there is too much sex or violence. A majority of viewers asked about their perceptions of sex and violence in several British and U.S. primetime series reported that there is too much sex and violence on television, but few indicated that they felt the sex or violence was excessive or unjustified within the context of the individual shows (Gunter & Stipp, 1992; Stipp & Lometti, 1991; Lometti, in press).

The results of this research are of course limited to the specific television programs the researchers asked respondents about. The more restrictive the list of programs, the less generalizable the results. Past research also forced respondents to make judgements about sex and violence in programs, when they may very well have other reasons for objecting to television shows.

The purpose of the present study was to try to go beyond previous research to identify what exactly viewers deem to be objectionable in television content without forcing them to talk about sex and violence if they did not want to do so. While it was anticipated that explicit depictions of sex and violence would top the list of objections, we did not want to predispose respondents to such answers. Rather, we let them tell us what things they found to be objectionable, letting them cite specific examples from shows that they had actually seen or heard about. Consequently we attempted to describe the level of viewer objection by answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the extent of viewer objection?

After identifying the level of viewers' objections, we then tried to define the specific programs, and elements within programs that viewers' found objectionable by answering these research questions:

RQ2: Which programs are unacceptable?

RQ3: What elements of programming are objectionable?

We included demographic questions in an attempt to answer the fourth research question:

RQ4: Who objects to television programs?

It was anticipated that while viewers would find some television content to be unacceptable, many would not be opposed to the material being shown under certain circumstances. Consequently, the fifth research question asks:

RQ5: What factors mediate objections?

Answering these descriptive questions still leaves unanswered a more interesting theoretical question of why do people object to television programs in the first place. The discrepancy between the general agreement that there is too much sex and violence on television and the small levels of objections to individual television programs can in part be explained by question wording and social desirability. The third-person effect literature may be able to shed additional light on why this discrepancy exits and further, why people object at all to programs that are watched by so many millions of Americans.

Third-person Effects

Commonly referred to as the "third-person effect," this hypothesis states that people have a perceptual bias which causes them to estimate that a communication will have a greater impact on others than on themselves (Davidson, 1983). Several studies have lent support to this hypothesis (Lasorsa, 1989; Mutz, 1989; Gunther, 1991; Cohen et al., 1988; Vallone, Ross & Lepper, 1985; Perloff, 1989; Gunther & Thorson, 1992).

A second part of the third-person effect hypothesis contends that people will be moved to react by this anticipated greater effect on others (Davidson, 1983). Davidson uses censors as an example. He says that "it is difficult to find a censor who will admit to having been adversely affected by the information whose dissemination is to be prohibited." It is the moral well-being of others which seems to most concern censors and therefore, causes them to take restrictive actions.

Research evidence which tests this aspect of the third-person hypothesis is limited. Gunther (1992) found that restrictive attitudes toward pornography were related to heightened concerns about its impact on other people. Three other studies, however either found weak support or failed to find support for the notion that third-person concerns affect attitudes (Mutz, 1989; Gunther, 1991; Griswold, 1992).

Despite the limited evidence regarding third-person effects on attitudes, it is reasonable to suggest that if viewers have objections to sex and violence in television content because they are concerned about how others will be affected, they are likely to hold restrictive attitudes toward the media. Consequently they may say there is too much sex and violence on television in part because they are concerned about how the programming will affect other people. At the same time they will continue to watch television. They also may object to a particular program that they watch because they think it may adversely affect another.

This suggests the following hypothesis:

H1: Viewers are more likely to hold restrictive attitudes toward television programs because of a concern for someone else rather than for other reasons.

Third-person effects research typically asks respondents to assess media effects on oneself and on others. This approach has been criticized because the observed effect could be due to question order. Some studies have counter-balanced the order of questions about media impact on self and others and still have found a third-person effect (Mason, 1991; Tiedge et al, 1991; Gunther, 1992). It is also possible that a third-person effect is due to the contrast respondents are asked to make between themselves and others. They may overestimate effects on others and underestimate effects on themselves in order to appear as if they have more control over their lives and are less influenced by outside forces. This study avoided this problem because respondents were not asked to contrast effects on self and others. Instead, if they held restrictive attitudes toward television, they were asked why they felt that way.

METHODS

Sample

This study was a national probability phone survey of adults, 18 years old or older, living in the contiguous United States. One thousand respondents were interviewed during the period of May 10-29, 1990. The sample was purchased from Survey Sampling Inc., and the field work was conducted by Russell Marketing Research, Inc. The response rate was 56%. Preceding the survey, 40 one-on-one in-depth phone interviews were conducted to aid in the development of the large scale survey interview schedule.

Measures

Respondents were asked if they watched, read about or discussed any of a representative list of 48 different television programs from the following eight genres: situation comedies, dramas, action/adventure shows, daytime soap operas, talk shows, reality programs, made-for-television movies and miniseries and theatrical movies. In addition, they reported the frequency with which they viewed each program.

For each program with which respondents were familiar, they were asked if they saw or heard about anything in each show that was personally unacceptable, i.e. things which made them feel personally uncomfortable or were morally inappropriate for television. For each program in which something was found to be unacceptable, in-depth probing was employed to describe in detail those program elements that respondents found to be unacceptable. They were asked to provide examples of things in the shows that they found unacceptable. These program elements were recorded by the interviewers. After answering questions about the sample of 48 programs listed within the eight program genres mentioned above, respondents were asked if there were any other programs that they found objectionable. Therefore, they could, at least theoretically, talk about any program they had ever seen or talked about before.

For each of the elements in a program that respondents indicated were unacceptable, they were asked if the objectionable material should not be shown on TV at all, just shouldn't be shown on a program from that genre, or was just something they personally would prefer not to watch but is acceptable for television. Next, for each unacceptable program element they were asked if it would be acceptable to show the offending program material if it were on a pay movie channel, on a commercial broadcast network, on pay per view, on late at night, on early in the morning, on at a time when children were not around, were an appropriate part of the story, done in a tasteful way, or if they were warned about the program content. Respondents were asked in an open ended question why they felt the specific program elements that they objected to should not be shown on television. The interview concluded with attitudinal and demographic questions.

RESULTS

Descriptive findings

The first research question looks at the extent of viewer objection. The answer to this question is that most people (59%) did not object to any television program. However, 41% found at least one program to be unacceptable.

Objections to specific programs were the subject of the second research question. The proportion of the population objecting to any given program was significantly less than the 41%. In fact, only five programs were unacceptable to more than 5% of the sample. Table 1 displays levels of viewer objectors for talk shows, situation comedies, evening dramas, and theatrical movies.

Insert Table 1 Here

Geraldo received the highest level of objection with 12% of the sample indicating that this show was unacceptable. It was followed by Donahue with 9%, Oprah Winfrey with 7%, Married With Children with 7%, and Dallas with 6%. All of the remaining programs had from 5% to 0% of the sample objecting. Table 2 lists the level of unacceptability for individual programs among the total sample and among those familiar with each program for action/adventure programs, reality shows, daytime soap operas, and TV movies and miniseries. For these programs, the highest percentage of the sample that objected to any one show was two percent. Levels of unacceptability go up somewhat when we looked at those who were familiar with the programs.

Insert Table 2 Here

The third research question asked about the specific program elements that viewers found unacceptable. The program elements were the examples respondents provided of the objectionable material in each offensive show. These elements were grouped into the following broad categories: violence, sex, language, and other objections. Overall, 50 percent of the viewer objections centered around sex, while violence accounted for 19 percent, language had 12 percent, and other objections made up 19%. This other category was comprised of objections that dealt with racism, sexism, and political and ideological issues. These figures fluctuated between program genres. Table 3 displays the percentage of objections that pertained to sex, violence, language, and other program elements across the eight genres of tv shows studied.

Insert Table 3 Here

More objections were made about sex in situation comedies, evening dramas, daytime soap operas and talk shows. Violence was a problem in theatrical movies, action/adventure and reality programs. Language was a small factor in objections against situation comedies, talk shows and theatrical movies.

The nature of objections to sexual content focused on sexually frank language, teen sex, extramarital sex, explicit lovemaking and homosexuality. Unacceptable violence includes blood, excessive force, rape, child abuse and spouse abuse. Objections to language fall into three categories: hells and damns, bitch and bastard and extreme language.

The fourth research question sought the identity of the program objectors. Tables 4 and 5 provide an objector profile for those with concerns about programs within each of the genres compared to the total sample.

Insert Tables 4 and 5 Here

Those people most likely to find something unacceptable in a television program tended to be women, aged 35-54, married, with children under 12 at home, not employed, well educated, who live in the mid-west and west.

The last research question asked about the circumstances under which objectional program elements might be less offensive. Table 6 shows that given their choice, most of these respondents would rather not have these programs on television. Overall, 53% indicated the offending programs should not be on TV, 14% said it should not be on the genre, 26% reported they would prefer not to watch, and 8% did not know or had no answer.

Insert Tables 6 Here

Those who objected to a program, reported they would be more tolerant of program elements that they found unacceptable if those elements were on pay movie channels (24%), pay per view (20%), late at night (20%), when children would not be present (19%), when viewers were pre-warned about specific program elements that they might find objectionable (17%), an appropriate part of the story (13%), were done in a tasteful way (13%), were not on a broadcast network (11%), or were on early in the morning (4%) (don't know/no answer was the response of 25% of the respondents.

Third-person Effects

The third-person effects hypothesis investigated in this study predicted that viewers would be more likely to want to censor television programs because of a concern for someone else rather than for other reasons. In order to test the hypothesis we examined the answers to the open-ended question about why respondents thought the specific program elements that they thought were unacceptable should not be shown on television. Table 7 reports the coded answers to this question.

Insert Table 7 Here

Overall there were more third-person concerns than other concerns (Z=4.33, p<.001). These results support the hypothesis. Significantly more third-person than non-third-person objections were evident with concerns for violence (Z=9.47, p<.001) and language (Z=4.94, p<.001), while the opposite was true for sexual objections (Z=2.87, p<.005).

Of the 995 total mentions, 53.9% involved a concern for other people, while 46.1% revolved around personal or moral reasons why the offensive material should not be shown on television. The third-person concerns centered around children. Respondents thought that the objectional program material would make children think that it was acceptable, or they felt that kids were not ready to see such material. Other third-person issues involved concern that it would give people ideas, make people think it is acceptable, or that people will imitate it. These concerns reflect the effects television may have on others. Non-third-person objections involved morality, beliefs, personal taste, or embarrassment.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide a detailed picture of the extent to which a nationally representative sample of adults object to television programming, what specifically they find problematic, and why they might want to censor television. While there is ample evidence that the public says there is too much sex and violence on television, we have been hard pressed to explain why the same public also spends so many hours watching television. This study has shed light on this question by exploring the extent to which the third-person hypothesis affords an explanation for the apparently paradoxical public stance.

In this study, most people (59%) did not object to any television programs. However, 41% found at least one program to be unacceptable. The proportion of the population objecting to any given program was significantly less than the 41%. In fact, only five programs were unacceptable to more than 5% of the sample. Geraldo received the highest level of objection with 12% of the sample indicating that this show was unacceptable. It was followed by Donahue with 9%, Oprah Winfrey with 7%, Married With Children with 7%, and Dallas with 6%. All of the remaining programs had from 5% to 0% of the sample objecting.

Most of the objections that viewers reported concerned sexual content (50%), followed by Violence (19%) and Language (12%). However these findings changed by program genre. Complaints about sex made up a significant portion of the objections for situation comedies, evening dramas, daytime soap operas and talk shows. Complaints about violence made up a significant portion of the objections in action adventure programs, reality shows and theatrical movies. Language was most problematic in situation comedies, talk shows, and theatrical movies.

The specific elements of sex, violence and language that respondents found unacceptable changed as a function of program genre. In situation comedies, the sexual elements of a program that were reported to be unacceptable tended to involve frank language, while the objections in daytime soap operas and evening dramas focused on explicit love-making.

Those people most likely to find something unacceptable in a television program tended to be women, aged 35-54, married, with children under 12 at home, not employed, well educated, who live in the mid-west and west.

Given their choice, most of these respondents would rather not have these programs on television. Those who objected to a program, reported they would be more tolerant of program elements that they found unacceptable if those elements were an appropriate part of the story, viewers were pre-warned about specific program elements that they might find objectionable, the programs were on late at night or when children would not present or when viewers pay to see the program.

The reasons most people had for restricting television programs centered around third-person effects. Viewers feared the impact of offending programs on other viewers. Primarily these other person concerns involved children. The third-person effects seen in this study were evident across the varying forms of offending program elements. In the case of violence and language, there were more third-person reasons than other forms of concern. Although 47 % of the respondents' reasons for restricting sexual content concerned other people, 53% of the reasons favoring censorship were based on moral grounds.

National probability sample surveys studying third-person effects are not common. In addition to utilizing a generalizable methodology this study examined concerns about media effects on others in a unique fashion. The single biggest reason why the public favored censoring offending television program content involved fear of how other people could be affected by the programs. Questions were not asked about effects on self and others (as is typically done in this research). Consequently question order could not be a factor in explaining away the third-person hypothesis. Also, respondents were not asked to contrast how they are affected compared to how other people are affected. They therefore were not put in a situation where they may have been concerned about how their sense of "susceptibility" to media effects appeared to the interviewers. Instead they were asked in an open-ended question why they might favor censorship of offending program content. If they had a concern about how other people are affected, the methodology "allowed" this response to be recorded unencumbered by contaminating issues.

The third-person hypothesis may prove useful in understanding public opinion about television. It seems that television viewers can simultaneously say that there is too much sex and violence on television at the same time that they spend numerous hours each week watching this material, primarily because their concerns about the content involve its impact on other people.

If third-person concerns are capable of influencing attitudes, then this hypothesis may explain how restrictive attitudes toward media develop. In this study third-person concerns were associated with restrictive attitudes toward television content. Many of us seem to be afraid of how others will be affected by offending programs. This fear may cause us to favor censorship. Future research will be necessary to test this causal explanation.

The actual effects of television program content may pale in importance compared to the third-person effects which could lead to significant segments of the public favoring censorship of program content. This may eventually result in media content restrictions. According to this view it would not be important if anyone were actually affected by television at all, as long as enough of us think someone will be affected. The long-standing debate within the scientific community about the actual effects of television content on attitudes and behavior may be overshadowed by third-person effects that result in media censorship.

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Table 1

LEVEL OF UNACCEPTABILITY FOR INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS AMONG THE TOTAL SAMPLE AND AMONG THOSE FAMILIAR WITH EACH PROGRAM

	Total Sample	Total Familiar With	Percent of Total Sample Familiar With Program(s)
Found something unacceptable in Talk Shows (Total)	22%	24%	92%
Geraldo	12	20	59
Donahue	9	13	67
Oprah Winfrey	7	10	75
Arsenio Hall	4	7	57
David Letterman	3	6	54
Johnny Carson	2	3	68
Found something unacceptable in Situation Comedies (Total)	16	17	94
Married With Children	7	12	58
Cheers	5	6	78
Roseanne	5	7	68
Golden Girls	4	6	74
The Simpsons	3	6	50
Doogie Howser	1	2	51
Found something unacceptable in Evening Dramas (Total)	12	13	88
Dallas	6	10	61
Knots Landing	4	7	56
L.A. Law	4	6	65
China Beach	2	3	56
Thirtysomething	2	3	54
Twin Peaks	1	3	34
Found something unacceptable in Theatrical Movies (Total)	9	11	77
Rambo Part III	4	7	53
Skin Deep	1	4	23
Scandal	1	3	12
Beetlejuice	2	4	56
See No Evil Hear No Evil	2	5	49
Bull Durham	2	5	38

Note: In those percentages labeled "Total Sample," the percentage reflects the number of respondents who found something unacceptable in a given program divided by the number of people in the total sample (1000). Those percentages labeled "Total Familiar With" indicate the same number of respondents who found something unacceptable in a given program, divided by the number of people who were familiar with the program.

Table 2

LEVEL OF UNACCEPTABILITY FOR INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS AMONG THE TOTAL SAMPLE AND AMONG THOSE FAMILIAR WITH EACH PROGRAM

	Total Sample	Total Familiar With	Percent of Total Sample Familiar With Program(s)
Found something unacceptable in Action/Adventure program (Total)	7%	7%	88%
Hunter	2	3	66
Tour of Duty	2	4	47
Wiseguy	2	3	52
MacGyver	1	1	68
21 Jump Street	1	1	48
Young Riders	1	1	47
Alien Nation	1	3	36
Found something unacceptable in Reality Shows (Total)	4	4	85
A Current Affair	2	4	56
Unsolved Mysteries	1	1	67
Cops	1	3	35
America's Most Wanted	1	2	61
Hard Copy	1	2	34
Found something unacceptable in Daytime Soap Operas (Total)	5	8	64
Santa Barbara	2	7	31
All My Children	2	4	46
Young and the Restless	2	4	42
Loving	1	3	17
Generations	1	3	13
General Hospital	1	3	45
Found something unacceptable in TV Movies and Miniseries (Total)	3	5	57
Fall From Grace	2	6	31
Summer Dreams	1	4	17
Burning Bridges	1	1	27
Voyage of Terror	1	3	16
Caroline	0	0	13
Child In The Night	0	0	10

Note: In those percentages labeled "Total Sample," the percentage reflects the number of respondents who found something unacceptable in a given program divided by the number of people in the total sample (1000). Those percentages labeled "Total Familiar With" indicate the same number of respondents who found something unacceptable in a given program, divided by the number of people who were familiar with the program.

Table 3

SPECIFIC OBJECTIONS

	Situation Comedies	Evening Dramas	Action Adventure	Daytime Soaps	Talk Shows	Reality Programs	TV Movies	Theatrical Movies
(# of Objectors)	(161)	(117)	(65)	(50)	(217)	(38)	(31)	(88)
# of Objections	239	204	99	86	331	51	32	121
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Sex	45%	66%	15%	74%	50%	16%	16%	21%
Sexually Frank Language	12%	--	3%	2%	7%	--	--	--
Teen Sex	7	--	--	2	1	--	--	--
Extramarital	1	15	3	10	3	--	3	--
Explicit Lovemaking	6	36	9	34	2	3	6	9
Homosexuality	--	5	3	4	14	--	--	--
Violence	8	12	56	--	11	45	16	35
With Blood	--	2	6	--	1	11	3	6
Excessive	--	4	29	--	2	13	3	18
Rape	--	--	--	--	1	--	--	1
Child Abuse	1	--	--	--	1	5	--	--
Spouse Abuse	1	2	--	--	--	3	3	--
Language	16	4	4	2	15	--	3	20
Hells and Damns	10	1	--	2	5	--	--	6
Bitch, Bastard	5	3	3	--	6	--	--	1
Extreme Language (FU's)	5	3	--	2	6	--	3	18
All Other Mentions	31	18	25	23	25	39	65	25
Don't Know/Not Sure								

* Note: Percents do not add due to multiple responses.

Table 4

OBJECTOR PROFILE

	Total	Situation Comedies	Evening Dramas	Action Adventure	Daytime Soaps	Talk Shows	Reality Programs	TV Movies	Theatrical Movies
Total Respondents	100% (1000)	100% (161)	100% (117)	100% (65)	100% (50)	100% (217)	100% (38)	100% (31)	100% (88)
Sex									
Male	50	32	32	45	30	41	42	48	45
Female	50	68	68	55	70	59	58	52	55
Age									
18-34	39	38	33	31	36	36	44	29	42
35-54	32	32	**37**	**39**	32	35	**45**	**45**	**49**
55+	29	30	30	20	32	29	11	26	9
Marital Status									
Married	57	61	65	**69**	60	**65**	63	**74**	64
Single	21	16	14	15	20	14	26	10	23
Widowed/Divorced/ Separated	16	18	15	12	18	18	8	6	8
With Children									
6-12	19	**27**	21	20	20	21	21	**35**	**27**
13-18	16	20	19	26	20	20	13	19	26
<12	37	**51**	43	**45**	**46**	44	**63**	**70**	**51**
Employed	66	53	59	58	40	58	74	52	73
Full Time	54	42	49	52	26	45	55	42	59
Part Time	12	11	10	6	14	13	19	10	14
Not Employed	32	**45**	39	38	**56**	41	26	**48**	26
Education									
College Grad Or +	27	25	**37**	35	30	32	**42**	29	**39**
Some College	25	19	19	15	16	26	18	26	23
High School	37	42	32	34	38	30	32	32	34
Tech	5	5	5	8	8	4	5	3	2
Income									
<35,000	43	50	45	42	50	53	50	48	40
>35,000	34	30	36	38	34	33	37	39	**49**

Table 5

OBJECTOR PROFILE

	Total	Situation Comedies	Evening Dramas	Action Adventure	Daytime Soaps	Talk Shows	Reality Programs	TV Movies	Theatrica Movies
Total Respondents	100% (1000)	100% (161)	100% (117)	100% (65)	100% (50)	100% (217)	100% (38)	100% (31)	100% (88)
Region									
Midwest	28	32	**37**	26	32	31	**39**	23	**36**
Northeast	20	14	13	9	12	12	8	13	17
South	34	30	36	38	34	35	26	26	30
West	19	24	15	**26**	22	22	**26**	**39**	17
County									
A	37	35	32	32	38	29	**45**	42	39
B	30	32	30	26	22	37	32	29	26
C	17	14	16	18	14	18	11	16	17
D	16	19	22	23	**26**	16	13	13	18
Cable	71	58	64	61	68	69	56	70	74
Pay	40	26	27	29	32	35	31	26	42
VCR	78	78	74	83	72	77	**87**	81	**89**
Time Zone									
Eastern	51	43	47	40	46	40	45	35	43
Central	30	32	**38**	34	32	**39**	29	26	**40**
Pacific	14	19	13	15	14	17	**24**	**35**	**13**
Mountain	5	5	3	11	8	5	3	3	5

Table 6

ATTITUDES TOWARD OBJECTIONABLE PROGRAM ELEMENTS

	Situation Comedies (161)	Evening Dramas (117)	Action Adventure (65)	Daytime Soaps (50)	Talk Shows (217)	Reality Programs (38)	TV Movies (31)	Theatrical Movies (88)
Sex	(59)	(77)	(13)	(29)	(84)	(8)	(5)	(21)
Should Not Be On TV	42%	61%	69%	72%	48%	38%	60%	52%
Should Not Be On Genre	24	17	23	10	13	25	--	14
Prefer Not To Watch	29	27	8	21	41	25	40	33
Sexually Frank Language	(20)	(0)	(2)	(1)	(15)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Should Not Be On TV	65	--	50	100	40	--	--	--
Should Not Be On Genre	15	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Prefer Not To Watch	5	--	50	--	27	--	--	--
Violence	(17)	(18)	(31)	(0)	(29)	(18)	(4)	(33)
Should Not Be On TV	41	50	58	--	35	39	50	70
Should Not Be On Genre	24	17	3	--	24	22	--	--
Prefer Not To Watch	29	28	32	--	35	33	25	30
Language	(30)	(6)	(4)	(2)	(34)	(0)	(1)	(21)
Should Not Be On TV	57	67	100	50	53	--	100	67
Should Not Be On Genre	40	33	--	--	15	--	--	10
Prefer Not To Watch	3	--	--	50	35	--	--	24

Table 7

Why Respondents Feel This Activity Should Not Be Shown On Television

	Total Mentions		Sex		Violence		Language	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Base: # of Mentions	(995)	100	(533)	100	(299)	100	(163)	100
Makes people think that it is acceptable	69	6.9	31	5.8	25	8.4	13	8.0
Makes children think that it is acceptable	212	21.3	91	17.1	71	23.7	50	30.7
Gives people ideas	87	8.7	40	7.5	40	13.4	7	4.3
People will imitate	33	3.3	11	2.1	21	7.0	1	.6
Kids are not ready	135	13.6	77	14.4	32	10.7	26	16.0
Third Person (Net)	**536**	**53.9**	**250**	**46.9**	**189**	**63.2**	**97**	**59.5**
Makes me sick	45	4.5	15	2.8	25	8.4	5	3.1
Against my beliefs	99	9.9	60	11.3	17	5.7	22	13.5
It is personally embarrasing	25	2.5	19	3.6	5	1.7	1	.6
It is immoral	111	11.2	79	14.8	14	4.7	18	11.0
Do not know / No answer	58	5.8	38	7.1	13	4.3	7	4.3
Other	121	12.2	72	13.5	36	12.0	13	8.0
Non-Third Person (Net)	**459**	**46.1**	**283**	**53.1**	**110**	**36.8**	**66**	**40.5**

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An Examination of the Relationship of Structural Pluralism, News Role and Source Use with Framing in the Context of a Community Controversy*

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ABSTRACT

An Examination of the Relationship of Structural Pluralism, News Role and Source Use with Framing in the Context of a Community Controversy

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This empirical study examines the relationship of macrosocial influences--structural pluralism, newspaper role and use of sources--on framing of news.

The study is set against the backdrop of a community controversy--the siting of a copper mine near Ladysmith, Wisconsin. Four story frames were found in press coverage: conflict frames, legitimacy frames, traditional values frames and oppositional values frames. In examining the relationship between frames and the independent variables, the author found that pluralism had a curvilinear relationship with story framing: News stories from communities with moderate-level pluralism were more likely than high and low-level pluralistic communities to engage in all four frames. In terms of predictive power, however, source use accounted for the greatest portion of variance on story frames, while news role offered a modicum of predictive power. Pluralism, however, offered no predictive power.

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Introduction

The current study examines how structural variables, including community pluralism, news role and use of sources, influence news coverage in the context of a community controversy. News coverage is operationalized as story framing and serves as the dependent variable in the study. The author explores the relationship of each of the macrosocial variables to framing, and then examines the overall predictive power of the variables on framing.

Framing is conceptualized as the essence of news stories--the underlying, core values expressed in story construction. Frames are operationalized along four dimensions, guided by the ideological rhetoric of activist groups that seek to slant news in their favor. Although frames have been characterized by some researchers as "ideological packaging," the current study seeks to extend this view to encompass factors beyond rhetoric. The study also examines the impact of the community structure--pluralism--and the judgment of editors of the newspapers' responsibility for engaging in social change.

The study is set against the backdrop of a controversy--the siting of a copper mine in Northern Wisconsin--that has engendered great community debate and plentiful news coverage. The mine dispute provides an ideal setting to examine how various contending groups and their views are portrayed in mass media.

Background of the Community Conflict

Several thousand acres have been marked for mineral exploration and extraction in

Wisconsin, with leases made to companies such as Exxon, Kerr-McGee, Universal Oil Products, Amoco, Rayrock Mines, Western Nuclear, E.K. Lehman and Getty Oil, Kennecott, and American Copper and Nickel (Gedicks, Clokey, Kennedy & Soref, 1982, pp. 13-16).

The current study examines one of these mineral ventures--the 40-acre Flambeau Copper Mine near Ladysmith--and the way news media characterized the mine siting.

Although the Flambeau mining project is considered small by industry standards, it is expected to result in a substantial flow of income into the regional community and to state coffers during a six-year period. Proponents of the project have argued that the mine promises jobs and tax dollars to a poor and under-employed community, while opponents argue that the mine will pollute a nearby river and watershed, and that the economic "boom" will be followed by an economic "bust."

The proposed mine became the focus of media attention with the issuance of the final environmental impact report in 1990. Public hearings resulting from the report drew heated debate and widespread media coverage in the summer of 1990. The hearing examiner gave the official go-ahead when he approved the mining permit six months following the summer hearings, in January 1991, and construction was slated to begin in July 1991.

However, the Sierra Club and a local band of the Ojibwa (Chippewa) Nation were successful in arguing that the state had improperly issued permits for the mine, in light that several endangered species--including a clam, a minnow and a dragonfly--were found near the site. These discussions also drew considerable media attention in the summer of 1991, and in August that year a circuit court judge enjoined the mine from further construction until the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) issued a revised environmental impact statement.

The victory for the Sierra Club and Indian band was short-lived, however. The DNR determined the species would not be impacted, and the courts concluded there was no basis to warrant further work stoppage. Construction resumed on the site.

In discussing the mine, opponents framed the issue around environmentalist, conservationist, health and democratic issues. Opponents claimed that the mine--which is located near a pristine river--would adversely impact natural resources in the region. One concern, for example, was the discharge of treated water into the river.

Groups that joined the Indians in opposing the mine included environmental organizations, such as the Sierra Club and the Greens party, Indian treaty rights organizations and citizens action groups.

Those in favor of the mine included the mining company, private businesses, some local and regional elected officials, local chambers of commerce, and a manufacturers and commerce lobbying group.

Literature Review, Research Questions and Operationalizations

The literature guiding the current study focuses on framing--the dependent variable--and structural pluralism, source use and news roles--the independent variables.

Story Framing

What is framing? Framing has been defined in a variety of ways and typically is used as either a microsocial or macrosocial construct. The origins of the construct are traced to Goffman's 1974 treatise, **Frame Analysis**, in which he described individual internal frames much in the way communication researchers conceptualize "schemas"--cognitive devices or blueprints individuals use for assembling order from information (p. 563). As a personal-level construct, framing helps people make sense of their worlds and gives meaning to "the dizzying parade of events" (Kinder & Sanders, 1990, p. 74).

The construct has also been explicated on a macrosocial level, referring to a particular slant of a news story, often associated with an ideological bent (Gitlin, 1980; Hartley, 1989; Ryan, 1991). Gitlin characterized framing as the central, organizing ideas behind news accounts and as "core principles of selection, exclusion and valuation" (p. 23). In this sense framing is a two-fold process that entails: (a) selection of information and sources, and (b) emphasis on material, individuals or issues deemed newsworthy. In more recent research, the construct has been used rather liberally to encompass many meanings. For Hartley (1989), frames reveal dominant ideology and explain what stories "are all about" (1989, p. 119). Ryan (1991) used framing as a journalistic process, referring to "how news stories are made, i.e., how pieces of information are selected and organized to produce stories that make sense to their writers and audiences" (p. 53). For Luke (1987) framing is ideological packaging.

The current study has embarked on an analysis of how news reflects the ideological rhetoric developed by claims-makers in the context of a community controversy. The rationale behind using the construct "framing" arose from the premise that claims-makers and advocates of a cause are active in constructing reality. Critical to this premise is the notion that objective reality "out there" does not exist (Blumer, 1969; Hackett, 1984). Rather, reality is a social construction. Framing is also a social construction, wedding claims-makers with news reporters. Frames, therefore, should reflect viewpoints of claims-makers as they appear in news accounts. We would expect to find relationships between frames and claims.

Research Statement. Story frames will reflect ideological viewpoints of the claims-makers.

Operationalization of frames. For the current study, frames were identified by first examining issues and messages that emerged from claims-makers' rhetoric. Literature, pamphlets, booklets and speeches produced by key groups were examined to trace concepts and stances embraced by the contestants in the conflict (Fishman, 1980; Gandy, 1982; Turk, 1985). These materials were chosen from a convenience sample, and do not necessarily reflect the universe of claims-makers' literature. Materials produced by activist groups ranged from news releases to flyers. Recurrent themes that reflected principal viewpoints are detailed below.

Mine Opponents' Claims. Several themes emerged from the claims in the environmental and Native American literature. One overriding claim was that the technical and legal **process** of approving mining permits was flawed and undemocratic. One pamphlet stated that the mine

> Represents a blow to the values on which our country was built: freedom of speech, political self-determination and the democratic accountability of elected officials. Multinational corporations are given the green light to dictate the future of communities rather than allowing communities to decide for themselves a sensible course for sustainable economic development (Greens Northwoods Taskforce pamphlet, undated).

Clearly the mining opponents used a democratic frame in discussing the legal and technical procedures for granting the mine permit. Moreover, mine companies were presented as outsiders interfering with local decision-making powers. Following are key claims made by mining opponents, based on the qualitative analysis of raw materials.

Theft. Opponents charged that multi-national companies invaded the state to steal "precious resources."

Monster. In addition to being thieves, mining corporations were characterized as monsters and devils.

Trust, ethics, morality and **delegitimation**. Claims-makers seized opportunities to delegitimize their opponents by questioning their motives and moral standing. Almost all the information subsidies found ways to link the opposition with unethical and immoral behavior.

Economic drawbacks. The mining opposition frequently pointed out that the benefits of mining were short-lived.

Capitalism--drawbacks. Anti-mining forces characterized mining groups as driven primarily by profit, and equated capitalism with profiteering.

Conservationist values. Environmentalist groups and Indians frequently argued that the mine would result in damage to the soil, groundwater and wildlife, invoking conservationist ethics.

Science and technology--drawbacks. Opponents pointed out inadequacies of science and technology in protecting against hazards.

Rape and **Mother Earth**. Opponents used the symbolism of rape when discussing the takeover of Great Lakes' land and minerals. Moreover, the earth was frequently described with female attributes.

Generational and **circle metaphor**. Native American documents discussed the relationship of one generation to another and the interdependence of living things. A circle offered a symbolic description of these concepts.

Mine Proponents' Claims. Those who supported the mine characterized their arguments in legal, technical, scientific and democratic frames. Scientific facts were commonly regarded by the mining company and the Department of Natural Resources as critical to the debate. Facts were an important symbolic claim, and were often entwined with the sanctity of laws and democracy. Pro-mining groups characterized the opposition as uninformed, irrational, emotional and child-like. Following are examples of recurrent themes.

Economic benefits and **partnership**. Mine proponents often used an economic platform to persuade others of virtues engendered by mining.

Capitalistic values. The spirit of capitalism in the market-driven society undergirds much of the literature by pro-mining forces.

Conservationism. Like the anti-mine forces, pro-mining coalitions also invoked the symbol of environmentalism throughout the campaign.

Science and Technology. Mine proponents held science and technology aloft, pointing out that new methods and techniques ensured the environment from degradation.

Delegitimation. Mine supporters found many ways to delegitimize the opposition, including questioning the trustworthiness and morality of their opponents.

Outsiders and **insiders**. Part of the legitimation contest between opposing views included identifying mine supporters as "insiders" and opponents as "outsiders."

Social progress. The metaphor of progress was used by proponents of the mine as a benefit of mining.

Structural Pluralism

Structural pluralism--when used in the context of mass media research--has been defined as "the extent to which one community is characterized by a greater diversity of potential sources of social power than another community" (Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1980, p. 40). Tichenor and colleagues have approached mass media studies by examining how **differences** in structural pluralism (shared power) influence news coverage.

News coverage varies according to the community where the newspaper is embedded. Tichenor, Donohue and Olien theorized that communities with small, close-knit groups of political and social leaders are more politically homogeneous. As a result, decision-making is carried out privately by a select, consensus-building cadre. In contrast, communities that are more politically heterogeneous boast a greater diversity of power brokers. The power differential will affect relationships within the media systems.

For the most part, Tichenor and colleagues have equated pluralistic and heterogeneous communities with larger, more metropolitan communities (Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1980; Olien, Tichenor & Donohue, 1987). Moreover, newspapers that reflect a more pluralistic social structure tend to be daily papers, while small-town newspapers reflect "a small-town outlook," (Olien et al., 1987).

An important research question arising from the relationship between community structure and news coverage is whether news content in more politically diverse communities is also **more pluralistic**. That is, does structural pluralism result in more pluralistic coverage? Griswold (1991) found that newspapers from communities with greater structural pluralism were more likely to use a greater breadth of story content and greater variety of news sources. But, in a study that compared national elite newspapers with daily, regional newspapers, Brown, Bybee, Wearden & Straughan (1987), found that elite press were less likely to reflect pluralistic coverage with a bias toward elite sources.

Coverage is also less likely to be pluralistic when an issue has direct economic benefits to the host community. For example, Swisher and Reese (1992) found that newspapers from regions dependent on the tobacco industry were more likely to give coverage to the industry, compared to cancer-related news stories, than did elite newspapers. Griffin and Dunwoody (1992) noted that health risks stemming from community-based Superfund sites were treated less critically than health risks generated from non-proximate locales.

Thus, we would expect to find a relationship between story framing and pluralism, and pose the following research question:

Research Question 1. What is the relationship between story framing and pluralism in the context of the mining controversy?

Operationalizing Pluralism. Pluralism in mass communication studies has been conceptually defined as shared power within social systems, with social diversity and community size serving as surrogates for social power. Tichenor and colleagues (1980) created a rank index of pluralism that included: 1) population of the municipality, 2) number of businesses in the community, 3) number of voluntary groups, 4) number of churches, and, 5) number of schools and educational centers. Griffin and Dunwoody (1992) incorporated variables that attempted to gauge diversity: The proportion of minority school children to white, and the number of different religious denominations. Over time, pluralism has shifted operationally to include measures of diversity, which serve as surrogates for social power.

For the current study eight variables have been identified as attributes of pluralistic communities: a) population size, b) political diversity, c) minority school diversity, d) number of volunteer service organizations, e) number of colleges, f) religious diversity, g) minority per capita income compared to whites', and h) business diversity.

In order to group the variables into one pluralism index, it was first necessary to transform each one to a similar standard, and z-scores were calculated for each variable. (Note that the political diversity variable was reverse-coded since a larger number indicated less diversity.) To test whether the eight indicators of pluralism would hold together in a pluralism index, an exploratory orthogonal factor analysis was run. Two distinct factors emerged. Seven variables loaded on the first factor (eigenvalue=5.2) and the business diversity variable emerged as a single, separate factor (eigenvalue=1.2). The business variable was dropped, and an additive index of the seven factors was created. The seven factors combined reliably into a single index (alpha=.93). The pluralism index thus included measures of: population, political diversity, minorities in schools, volunteer organizations, colleges, religious denominations and income diversity.

Source Use

Researchers have been interested in which sources are used in news, and have sought evidence that source use legitimizes some individuals over others, and thus some claims over others.

As many have noted, not all sources are treated equally in the news media. Much research attention has focused on the premise that government and bureaucratic sources are more likely to be interviewed and treated as credible (Fishman, 1980; Lasorsa & Reese, 1990; Molotch & Lester, 1975). Sources outside the mainstream are less likely to be accorded the same credibility, and are less likely to be interviewed in the first place (Berkowitz & Beach, 1993; Ringer & Lawless, 1989; Shoemaker, 1984; Smith, 1993; Soloski, 1989; Van Dijk, 1987).

Who are sources used in mass media accounts? They are individuals--typically government officials and other elites--who develop working relationships with journalists, and who are called upon to explain issues and events. Sources are essential in the reporting process and, according to some views, bestowed the power to shape the media agenda (Gandy, 1980, 1982; Gitlin, 1980; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Molotch & Lester, 1975).

Mass media researchers have turned to source use and journalistic routines to demonstrate hegemonic relationships between political systems and media systems. Reese (1990) noted that media

> Accept the frames imposed on events by officials and marginalize and delegitimate voices that fall outside the dominant elite circles. By perpetuating common-sensical notions of who ought to be treated as authoritative, these routines help the system maintain control without sacrificing legitimacy....The media establish what is normal and deviant by the way they portray people and ideas (pp. 394-395).

We would therefore expect that sources help shape news content--but **which** sources shape **what type** of content? This leads to the next question:

Research Question 2. What is the relationship between sources and framing in the context of the mining controversy?

Operationalization of Sources. Sources were operationalized according to their organizations: 1) DNR (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources), 2) State and Federal Government (for example, departments of health and social services, universities, state or federal courts, Environmental Protection Agency, etc.); 3) county and city government (police, sheriff, local courts, schools); 4) business (private business and business promotion organizations, such as chambers of commerce); 5) mine (mining companies); 6) Indian

(Native American nations, bands, and support organizations, such as treaty rights groups); 7) environmental and wildlife (Sierra Club, Wisconsin Greens, Earth First!); 8) protest organizations (Flambeau Summer, Rusk County Citizens Actions Committee).

News Roles

The link between community structure and news coverage has engendered discussion about the role of the press in fulfilling an adversarial or watchdog role, particularly in the context of controversy, concluding that conflict is **less** likely to be given an airing in newspapers from homogeneous communities (Griffin & Dunwoody, 1992; Rossow & Dunwoody, 1991; Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1980). This view hinges on expectations of what roles media **should** embrace. Some, like McQuail (1987, pp. 112-116), traced this normative view to John Milton and John Stuart Mill, who provided the basis for the landmark document, **A Free and Responsible Press** (1947). The presumption is that media should serve not only to inform and educate, but to behave in a socially responsible manner, providing a platform for diverse views.

Role measurement was developed by Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman in a 1976 benchmark study on journalists. Following an extensive survey, Johnstone and colleagues concluded that newsfolk can be defined by either neutral or participant roles. The neutral role is characterized as transmitter and gatherer, while the participant role embraces active involvement on the part of the journalist (p. 115).

Culbertson (1983) provided an important link between role and structural pluralism, noting that journalists' beliefs in more traditional roles were associated with emphasis on local news stories, while journalists who followed more interpretive and activist roles downgraded the importance of local news. Moreover, non-traditional (non-neutral) roles were more likely to occur in big-city papers--what Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1980) would call pluralistic settings.

Weaver and Wilhoit (1986, 1991) expanded role definition, and found **three** types of roles: Neutral, participant and adversarial (they called the neutral role "disseminator" and the participant role "interpretive"). They also noted that, in practice, these roles are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The way news roles are operationalized reveals two important assumptions: The first is that journalists' attitudes about roles reflect a normative condition about what media roles **ought** to be. Secondly, data are based on individual perception or judgment about news roles. The working definition of news role thus reveals individual **perception** of **normative** role.

We would therefore expect that editors' views of new roles would play a critical component in how news is covered--if editors view their roles as more adversarial, coverage should reflect a more watchdog role. Thus, the third research question is:

Research Question 3. What is the relationship between role and framing in the context of the mining controversy?

Operationalization of Role. One way of gauging role is to interview editors. Editors, as gatekeepers, are essential in setting journalistic standards and norms in the news room. As gatekeeper, the editor is responsible for what information is published and in what form. Moreover, editors may also represent management and the business-side of the newspaper, thus bringing to bear a different set of constraints on the news product. Olien, Tichenor and

Donohue (1989) pointed out that small-town editors, for example, perform a wider variety of tasks--from copy-editing to advertising decisions--and are thus exposed to myriad organizational pressures. Such macrolevel constraints also influence the news product.

Editors' perceptions serve as useful operationalizations of role for three reasons: First, perceived role offers an alternate method (compared with news content) to assess role; second, news editors are responsible for seeing that their staffs carry out the role and mission of the newspaper; and third, editors' perceptions provide a link between macrolevel (organizational) and microlevel (perception) patterns, providing a useful connection in mass communication research (Pan & McLeod, 1991).

The author interviewed editors of each publication. Editors were asked to explain the newspaper's overriding role and mission, and to describe the newspaper's relationship within the context of the community. Interviews were conducted on the telephone, and most conversations lasted between 20 and 30 minutes.

To operationalize perceive role, the author assigned a numeric rank to each newspaper based on the editor's view of his or her newspaper's role. A large number reflects a more adversarial viewpoint, while a smaller number reflects less willingness to embrace social change. In some cases, two editors received the same numeric rank because no difference was seen in their viewpoints.

Predictors of Framing

Researchers who have examined each of the three macrolevel variables described above--source use, pluralism and news role--concur that each offers some influence in the production of news. In addition to exploring these relationships separately (source use and framing, pluralism and framing, news role and framing), it is useful to examine which of these variables explains greatest proportion of variance on framing. The literature has supported a relationship between conflict coverage and pluralism, but clearly sources should also make an impact on coverage. This leads to the final research question:

Research Question 4. Which macrolevel variables--source use, pluralism and perceived role--offers the greatest predictive power on story framing in the context of the mining controversy?

Methodology

Newspaper Selection

Because the study entails an examination of news content, a time frame was chosen that included the greatest proportion of coverage. The height of activity took place in the summer months of 1990 and 1991, thus, an 18-month time period was selected, from March 1990 through August 1991.

Newspapers were selected from communities with a variety of structural heterogeneity: Two large metropolitan newspapers were selected; four daily newspapers from mid-sized communities were included, and four small-town weekly newspapers were chosen. In all, ten newspapers were represented, resulting in 462 news stories.

All news articles that discussed the copper mine during the 18-month time period were selected. Letters to the editor, editorial cartoons, opinion-editorial pieces and advertisements were **not** included.

Measuring Frames

Recall that activists' claims were assembled from their written literature, and these served largely as the basis for story coding. Two coders read all news stories for the presence of claims that were articulated in raw materials. For example, mine supporters characterized the project as a partnership with the community. Coders then looked for the partnership metaphor in news stories.

In addition to assessing stories for claims, coders also examined content for mentions of conflict, including metaphors that signalled war and battle. Conflict was thought to be an important construct--or frame--in the mine controversy, in light that several researchers have found a pattern between conflict coverage and pluralism (Griffin & Dunwoody, 1992; Rossow & Dunwoody, 1991; Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1980). Conflict for the current study was defined as a dispute between two (or more) factions within the Ladysmith controversy.

Claims and conflict were operationalized in two ways: As mentions and metaphors. In most cases, **manifest** content was used, where the meaning of the term is obvious. **Latent** coding was used in some cases, but coders met first to discuss each instance of latent coding. For example, opponents pointed out the mine would result in an economic "boom and bust cycle." Coders agreed that this metaphor was intended as a drawback of mining, and was coded as "economic drawback." Coders looked for words or phrases (mentions) including metaphors that expressed claims. If a phrase represented a mention and a metaphor simultaneously, the term was coded only once.

The literature on framing was used to guide the author in assessing how content might best be operationalized as frames. Based on the literature and the nature of the conflict, four frames were expected to emerge from the content: Conflict, legitimacy, oppositional values and traditional values frames. Conflict has been found as a frame in similar environmental and political issues (see, for example, Griffin & Dunwoody, in press); legitimacy frames are expected to arise in political and social conflict (see, for example, Shoemaker, 1984); and traditional values and non-traditional values are expected when two sides confront one another (see, for example, Gitlin, 1980).

All content variables were then examined to see how they would best fit into these four dimensions: conflict, legitimacy, traditional values and non-traditional (oppositional) values. To test these relationships, a factor analysis was run on all variables. Initially six factors emerged, but the loadings did not make conceptual sense, and some loadings were quite small. After dropping variables that had low loadings, another factor analysis was run, restricting the analysis to four factors. The factors each had eigenvalues greater than 1, and explained 48 percent of the variance. The factors were labeled as follows, and then saved as factor scores: (1) **Oppositional Values Frame** (government trust is questioned, mine trust is questioned, non-conservationist values, child and generational metaphors, and mining as theft); (2) **Conflict Frame** (conflict mentions and war metaphors); (3) **Legitimacy Frame** (Delegitimation statements about mine opponents, opponents' trust is questioned, opponents as outsiders, and supporters as insiders; (4) **Traditional Values Frame** (economic benefits, capitalistic values, values overriding conservationism, and science and technology as a value). (See Table 1).

Intercoder reliability

Two coders read the 462 news stories and met on two occasions to check intercoder reliability. Inter-coder agreement was examined in two areas: One section that included 135, dichotomous (yes/no) codes, and a section that included questions that had more than two answer choices. Intercoder agreement for the dichotomous questions was 90 percent, or a match of 122 out of a possible 135 choices. Scott's (1955) formula was also used to create an index of reliability (pi), which is based on expected agreement and observed agreement. For the dichotomous questions, Scott's pi was .67. For the other section, Scott's pi ranged from acceptable to better-than-average, .67 to .90.

Results

Frames and Pluralism

Recall that the research questions posed in the beginning of this paper considered the relationship between frames and the macrosocial variables--pluralism, source use and perceived role.

Because some researchers have noted that pluralism is not always linearly associated with independent variables (Griffin & Dunwoody, in press), pluralism was grouped into three categories--low, medium and high. To examine the relationship between pluralism and framing, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) from the SPSS-PC statistical program was used. This procedure allowed examination of the observed and adjusted conflict means across levels of pluralism.

Recall that the frames are comprised of loadings on each of the four, conceptually distinct factors (conflict, legitimacy, oppositional values, and traditional values). The contribution of each variable to each frame was standardized before the four factors were saved as weighted scores. Because of this standardization, the mean of each frame is "0" and the standard deviation is "1." Bear in mind that one news story might have a conflict frame score of .5, while another story might have a score of -.3. However, the -.3 score does **not** indicate a **negative** use of the frame: Rather the score indicates use of the frame that is lower than the mean.

Control Variables. Three variables were used as "controls" in examining relationships of frames with the independent variables: Total words, wire story, newspaper ownership and role. Total words were operationalized as all words in each story. The wire story variable was coded "1" if attributed to wire sources and "0" for staff-written stories. Newspaper ownership was operationalized using three categories, including: "0" for locally owned, non-chain newspaper; "1" for chain newspaper with ownership headquartered in the same state, and "2" for chain newspaper with ownership located out of state. The editor's perceived role, which was detailed earlier in the document, was a ranking of editors' attitudes regarding the role of the newspaper in embracing social change.

Findings. The observed means obtained on the conflict frame in the three pluralism categories show a curvilinear relationship between pluralism and conflict. News stories from communities with medium-level pluralism are more likely to incorporate conflict frames (mean=.20) than news stories from high (mean=.08) and low (mean= -.17) pluralistic communities. But these mean differences do not reflect the influence of the control variables which, when entered, did contribute to the overall variance on the conflict frame. (See Table 2).

Once control variables were introduced, the effect of pluralism on conflict shifted somewhat, but the relationship was still curvilinear. Conflict frames are associated more with medium-level pluralism (adjusted mean=.16) than with low (adjusted mean= -.02) or high pluralism (adjusted mean= -.02). Tests of significance are not used in this example, in view that the news stories represent a population census, rather than a sample.

Traditional Values. Recall that the traditional frame was a factor score, and four variables loaded heavily on the frame: economic benefits, conservationist values, science and technology as values, and capitalistic values.

The initial, observed means from the MANOVA show that news stories from communities with low pluralism were somewhat more likely to use traditional values than other newspapers. When the control variables were introduced, however, the influence of pluralism shifted: News stories from communities with medium-level pluralism (adjusted mean=.15) are more likely to use the traditional values frame than stories in low-pluralism communities (adjusted mean= -.14) or high pluralism communities (adjusted mean= -.00). This finding suggests that news stories from communities with low pluralism are less likely to use this type of frame. Therefore, it appears that news stories from communities in the middle pluralism category do use frames that embrace traditional values.

Legitimation. Variables loading highly and positively on this factor included mentions of mine opponents as "outsiders," mentions of the mining company as "insiders," the trust of mining opponents was questioned, and mentions that delegitimated the mining opponents.

The observed means from the MANOVA show that stories from low and medium pluralistic communities are more likely to use legitimation frames than news stories in highly pluralistic communities. Once the control variables were introduced, however, the adjusted means show a greater difference between levels of pluralism and framing: News stories from medium-level communities were most likely to use legitimating frames (adjusted mean=.08) compared with high (adjusted mean= -.09) and low pluralistic communities (adjusted mean= -.04). The findings demonstrate a curvilinear relationship between pluralism and framing: News stories from communities of medium-level pluralism are more likely to engage in frames that delegitimize the mining opponents.

Oppositional Frames. Five variables loaded highly on the frame: Child and future generations metaphor, mining-as-theft metaphor, the questioning of the mining company's trust, questioning of government trust, and non-conservationist values. The observed means demonstrate that news stories from communities with high pluralism are more likely to use oppositional frames. However, when the control variables were included in the analysis, this relationship changed: News stories from medium-level communities (adjusted mean=.07) are more likely than low-pluralistic communities to use oppositional frames (adjusted mean= -.17). Stories from high pluralistic communities (adjusted mean=.02) are also more likely than communities with low pluralism to use oppositional frames.

Role and Framing

The second research question considered the relationship between role and story frame. And while it was assumed that the relationship between role and frame would be linear, but the findings show almost no linear association between framing and perceived role. The largest association was found between the conflict frame and role (r=.11)--a very weak relationship. (See Table 3).

Source Use and Framing

Sources do appear to be related with story frames, but these associations vary according to which frame is examined.

For the conflict frame, protesters, environmentalists, county-city and business sources were positively related to conflict frames. But DNR source use was negatively related to conflict framing (r=-.20). (See Table 3).

For the legitimacy frame, sources that supported the mine were likely to be used--business and mining interests--but so were county and city sources.

When traditional values were employed as frames, pro-mine and bureaucratic sources tended to be used: business, mine, DNR, and state-federal sources correlated with this frame.

When the oppositional frame was used--the frame that embraced non-traditional values--sources likely to be quoted included Indian and environmentalists. In addition, state-federal sources were used. Thus, sources are linked to framing, and in ways that the literature supports.

Variables that Predict to Frames

In order to examine the final research question--that is, which macrosocial variables best predict story frames--multiple regressions were run on all four frames. For this analysis, the pluralism variable was transformed using exponentiation, with the aim of making the association with framing more linear. Independent variables were entered in three blocks. The first block included three control variables: The number of total words in each story, whether or not the story was wire or staff-written, and newspaper ownership. Variables entered on the second block included all sources, and the last block included pluralism and perceived role.

Findings. For the most part, sources make the greatest contribution to story framing, with role making a small impact, and pluralism explaining almost none of the variance. (See Table 4).

Conflict frame. Sources explain most of the variance on conflict frame, after accounting for the control variables. Of the total variance (r-square=.20), sources explain the greatest portion. Looking at the weighted betas, one can see that protesters (.22) and environmentalists (.15) make a positive impact, while use of DNR sources (-.24) is negatively related to framing. Role also contributes positively (beta=.20), but pluralism appears to have practically no apparent impact (.05).

Oppositional frame. Sources account for most of the variance on the oppositional frame (r-square=.23). Indians (.27), state-federal (.23) and environmentalists (.17) contribute the greatest, weighted betas. Role and pluralism have no impact.

Traditional frame. When stories use traditional framing, bureaucratic sources make the greatest proportional contribution to the overall variance (r-square=.20). Mining (.20) and business (.20) interests had the greatest impact, followed by DNR (.16) and state-federal (.16) sources. Pluralism made no sizeable impact, although perceived role made a marginal--and negative--impact (-.11).

Legitimacy frame. The overall variance on legitimacy framing is tiny (r-square=.05), and the individual betas are quite small. Overall, the independent variables offer little predictive power on this frame.

Discussion

Five issues have been examined in the study: (a) whether frames can be constructed based on ideological viewpoints, (b) the relationship of community structure to story framing, (c) the relationship of sources to framing, (d) the relationship of role to framing, and (e) predictors of story frames.

Researchers have identified story frames as "ideological packaging," and the study supports the notion that viewpoints from activists in the mining conflict helped frame news content along ideological perspectives. The literature has suggested that some of the ways conflictive news stories are framed entails dueling ideological perspectives. In the case of the Great Lakes copper mine, frames that embraced traditional values--such as economic promise and efficacy of technological safety standards--and frames that characterized non-traditional values--such as the Native American circle of interrelationships and questioning the trust of government and mine businesses--were used to cast the controversy in print media. In addition, frames appeared that characterized the mining opponents in an unfavorable light, while positioning the mine supporters as insiders and partners. And, like other community issues that incorporate environmental ethics, the copper mine was characterized as a conflict, battle and war between opposing viewpoints.

One concern was how these frames would be related to macrosocial constructs of community pluralism, source use and perceived role.

Community Structure and Framing. An interesting finding is the curvilinear relationship of pluralism to story framing. Although many studies that have incorporated a measure of community structure--pluralism--reported a linear relationship with story content and source use, others have questioned whether a linear relationship endures in all situations (Griffin & Dunwoody, in press). Similarly, the current study reveals that news stories in the middle-pluralism group were more likely to frame stories as conflictual, more likely to use frames that legitimized mining and delegitimizing the opposition, and were more likely to use traditional ideological frames, while at the same time, using frames that espoused non-traditional ideological views.

The findings suggests that news stories from communities with a moderate level of pluralism may view such community issues differently than newspapers in communities with--for example--low pluralism. Scholars have argued that newspapers in more homogeneous--less pluralistic--communities are more likely to avoid conflict while building consensus, and the current study bears out this thesis. But researchers have also long assumed that newspapers in communities that are **more** pluralistic will engage in more pluralistic coverage--embracing a range of viewpoints and ideologies. And, to a certain extent, this is true: More pluralistic communities **do** engage in more pluralistic coverage--to a point. News stories that arise from communities with medium pluralism do seem as likely to embrace the range of sources and frames--but their highly pluralistic counterparts do not.

On one level it appears as though newspapers in middle-level pluralistic settings provide more complete coverage of the mining controversy by providing a variety of story frames. However, these papers also framed the issue along conflictive lines, and this may ultimately result in a disservice to readers. Characterizing the issue as a war or battle implies two distinct sides in combat. But the issue is arguably more complex. A subtle metaphor emerges when characterizing the dispute as a battle between two sides--implying that one side will emerge victorious. Battles between Indians and the U.S. government have historically favored federal institutions. Similarly battles between environmentalists and government have resulted in the characterization of opponents as rabble-rousers and outsiders, threatening order.

Legitimation tactics constitute a frame in the study--a frame that mid-level pluralistic communities were more likely to adopt. This demonstrates that, while mid-level communities embrace many frames and voices, they may also balance traditional views with non-traditional views. In other words, these frames may have the effect of canceling out each other. What we do not know, however, is the effect on readers.

No doubt, however, readers who turn to small-town press are getting a much more narrow perspective on the controversy.

Predictors of Framing. While pluralism is associated with framing, it does not appear to be a sizeable influence when other factors are examined as predictors of framing. The size of the story, whether is was staff-written or not, and the ownership explain a small portion of the variance on conflict, traditional and oppositional frames. Perceived role also contributed to framing, but the weighted betas are small, with the most impact seen in the conflict frame (beta=.20). In no other frame did perceived role contribute substantively.

When stories were framed along conflictive lines, sources from environmental and protest groups were more likely to be used. One paper described the mining issue as conflictive, and quoted from an environmental activist: "[Activist] said the issue has divided the people in the town...turning neighbor against neighbor ("Local Activists," **Chronotype**, 4 July 1990, p. 1). Yet, when traditional frames were employed--frames that endorse economic benefits of mining and the value of science and technology--DNR sources more likely to be quoted along with state, federal, mine, and business officials. These views suggest that scientists and technicians do not present value-free judgments: Rather, they present views that reflect the merits of the legal and technical social system. One DNR spokesman said, "Our analysis indicated that the environmental impacts of the project would generally be short-term in nature and within the allowable limits prescribed by state law" ("Impact Statement," **Chronotype**, 21 March 1990, p. 8).

Future Research. Future studies should incorporate ways to delve into the issue of public opinion and framing of community conflict. Few studies have extended pluralism and framing to effects on readers and viewers. Clearly we do not know from this study how readers respond to legitimacy and conflict frames as they appear in print.

We should also ask whether editors from mid-level pluralistic communities are being better served by their local press than readers in other communities. Although the study finds that such newspapers are more likely to adopt several frames and a breadth of sources, this does not necessarily mean that readers receive the fullest range of perspectives.

Although one limitation of the study is its generalizability to other issues involving community conflict, some findings do support past research efforts. For example, the copper mine issue news coverage evolved from one issue to another--beginning with queries into health risks and ending with an examination of legal battles. While the Indian and environmental literature described the controversy as a conflict in values and environmental ethics, government officials treated the issue in technical and legal terms. Such findings support similar mass communication research--that issues characterized by some groups as health, risk and environmental are re-shaped in the mass media over time.

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Chippewa Herald Telegram

Eau Claire Leader Telegram

Ladysmith News

Milwaukee Journal

Phillips Bee

Rice Lake Chronotype

Sawyer County Record

Superior Evening Telegram

Wausau Daily Herald

Wisconsin State Journal

Table 1

STORY FRAME FACTORS

	Oppositon Values Frame	Conflict Frame	Legitim. Frame	Tradit. Values Frame
Variables				
No trust-govern	**.6635**	.0287	0729	.1978
Conservation	**.6412**	.1786	-.0921	.0163
Generations	**.6412**	-.1778	1099	-.0963
Theft	**.6284**	.3076	-.0376	.2144
No Trust-mine	**.5565**	.0583	0583	.1134
Conflict	.1574	**.8457**	.0620	.0103
War	.1209	**.8222**	0817	.0381
Delegit tactic	.0502	.0335	**.7230**	.0891
No trust oppon.	.1438	-.0088	**.6383**	-.0572
Insider	-.0616	.0258	**.5980**	.0690
Outsider	-.0188	.0898	**.5807**	.0601
Benel mine	.0447	.1519	.1170	**.6789**
Capital value	.1432	.1289	.1676	**.6369**
Non-conservation	.2597	-.0287	.0007	**.5960**
Science-techn	-.1060	-.2973	-.1079	**.5471**

Table 2

Effects of Pluralism on Frame Means

		Independent Variable			Controls	Beta
		Pluralism			Wire story	.07
					Words	.21
		Low	Med.	High	Owner	-.03
Dependent Variable					Role	.11
Conflict Frame	(obs)	-.17	.20	.08		
	(adj)	-.02	.16	-.02		

		Independent Variable			Controls	Beta
		Pluralism			Wire story	.03
					Words	.29
		Low	Med.	High	Owner	.18
Dependent Variable					Role	-.10
Traditional Frame	(obs)	.05	-.03	-.02		
	(adj)	-.14	.15	-.00		

		Independent Variable			Controls	Beta
		Pluralism			Wire story	.03
					Words	.12
		Low	Med.	High	Owner	.07
Dependent Variable					Role	-.04
Legitimacy Frame	(obs)	.04	.02	-.11		
	(adj)	-.04	.08	-.09		

(Table 2 continued)

		Independent Variable		
		Pluralism		
Dependent Variable		Low	Med.	High
Oppositional	(obs)	-.11	-.04	.07
Frame	(adj)	-.17	.07	.02
		n=133	n=181	n=148

Controls	Beta
Wire story	-.08
Words	.28
Owner	.08
Role	-.01

Table 3

Correlations of Frames with Perceived Role and Sources

	CONFLICT FRAME	LEGITIMACY FRAME	TRADITIONAL FRAME	OPPPOSITIONAL FRAME
ROLE	.11	-.04	-.02	.04
SOURCES				
DNR	-.20	-.05	.18	.04
State-Fed	.04	-.02	.16	.24
County-City	.13	.15	.10	.06
Business	.12	.14	.27	.07
Mine	.07	.11	.26	.11
Indian	.07	-.04	-.00	.29
Environ.	.17	.08	.10	.27
Protest	.25	.07	.05	.10

n=462

Table 4

Effects on Framing

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables		Final Beta	Incremental R-Square
Conflict Frame	Controls			
		Words	.09	
		Owner	-.12	
		Wire	.11	.05
	Sources			
		Indian	.05	
		Protest	.22	
		DNR	-.24	
		State-Fed	.03	
		Mine	-.04	
		Business	.06	
		County-City	.10	
		Environment	.15	.18
	Pluralism		.05	
	Perceived Role		.20	.20

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables		Final Beta	Incremental R-Square
Traditional Value Frame	Controls			
		Words	.11	
		Owner	.10	
		Wire	.00	.08
	Sources			
		Indian	-.00	
		Protest	.01	
		DNR	.16	
		State-Fed	.16	
		Mine	.20	
		Business	.20	
		County-City	.05	
		Environment	-.07	.19
	Pluralism		-.02	
	Perceived Role		-.11	.20

(Table 4 contined)

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	Final Beta	Incremental R-Square
Oppositional Values Frame	Controls		
	Words	.08	
	Owner	-.01	
	Wire	-.09	08
	Sources		
	Indian	.27	
	Protest	.10	
	DNR	.00	
	State-Fed	.23	
	Mine	.02	
	Business	-.00	
	County-City	.08	
	Environment	.17	23
	Pluralism	.00	
	Perceived Role	.02	.23

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	Final Beta	Incremental R-Square
Legitimacy Frame	Controls		
	Words	-.01	
	Owner	.03	
	Wire	.04	.01
	Sources		
	Indian	-.04	
	Protest	.04	
	DNR	-.05	
	State-Fed	-.00	
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Covering Xenophobia:
Mass Media and the "Holocaust Denial" Controversy

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ABSTRACT

Holocaust revisionism has confronted the mass media with an ethical dilemma: whether to sustain the competing virtues of free speech or the truthfulness of the historical accounts of the genocide of Jews in World War II. This paper explores the issue of Holocaust revisionism in light of the moral quandary faced by scholars and journalists, and how the issue has been used as the basis of a media campaign. Communicators often construe news and information as neutral, and are guided by principles of accuracy, fairness and timeliness. The Holocaust is contested terrain which challenges the moral neutrality of information. Some implications of this contest are reviewed in this paper in light of the role of revisionism in historiography, the motives of holocaust revisionists, and the outrage of survivors and defenders of holocaust's victims.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the issue of Holocaust revisionism in the context of mass media's ethical responsibility for promulgating the agenda of those who would doubt the historicity of Holocaust atrocities. An important premise of this examination is that problem cannot be understood narrowly as a local event, but must be grasped in context of both its international and historical context as a social problem.

The "Holocaust denial" movement is based on the controversial premise that Jews were not the target for persecution and genocide by the Third Reich in World War II. Holocaust revisionism, as it is sometimes called, contradicts the overwhelming body of empirical evidence from eyewitnesses, historical photographs, and documents. Such evidence, revisionists say, was concocted to promote international sympathy for Jewish victimization and ensure financial reparations. More harshly, revisionists often stake their claims on some form of international Jewish conspiracy.

Specific revisionist claims, like those of far-right English journalist-historian David Irving,[1] attempt to build a case that Hitler did not know of, and certainly did not issue, a written order for the extermination of the European Jews. Such reasoning is dismissed by most social scientists who address the subject as either bad, or openly dishonest, research.[2] Many simply feel it is a waste of time to pay attention to claims that there were no concentration camp ovens, no diary by Anne Frank, and no deliberate intention by Hitler to exterminate Jews in World War II.

The managers of American media are being confronted with decisions whether they should portray the claims of Holocaust denial as a legitimate point of view, or if they should openly condemn such claims as a lightly disguised form of hate speech. It is apparent, in either case, the questions of the reality of the Holocaust obtrude into public dialogue fomenting a mixture of curiosity and anguish. This controversy, perplexing on its face, is even more difficult because it opens old unresolved uncertainties from a war that refuses to fade from collective social memory. The critical success of Steven Spielberg's movie "Schindler's List" is testimony of the persistent relevance of the Holocaust to American and European audiences a half century later.

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[1] David Irving, *The War Path: Hitler's Germany, 1933-1939,* New York: 1978.
[2] Robert G.L. Waite, "The Perpetrator: Hitler and the Holocaust," *Human Responses to the Holocaust,* Ed. Michael D. Ryan, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979, p. 15.

The Campaign of Doubt

In 1942, Vernon McKenzie noted in *Journalism Quarterly* the deep cynicism which lead Americans to discount or even dismiss press reports of World War II atrocities.[3] There were reasonably accurate reports distributed in the press about the fate of thousands of Jews under the Third Reich by 1942, but many people felt they had learned a lesson by the exaggerated claims of war atrocities during World War I. Even by the end of 1944, although 76 percent of those asked by the Gallup poll believed many people had been murdered in concentration camps, they generally did not believe in the existence of gas chambers and death camps.[4] Furthermore, the Allies had asked the press during the war to avoid publicizing reports of atrocities against Jews as a distinct group.[5] As explained by Barbara Lipstadt:

> The Allies argued that if they treated Jews as a separate entity, it would validate Nazi ideology. A truer explanation was American and British fear that singling out the unique fate of Jews would strengthen the demands of those who wanted the Allies to understand specific rescue action on their behalf.[6]

A half century later, the American conscience has still not resolved its collective guilt over culpability for the death of millions of Jews. It should not be surprising perhaps that such a traumatic episode has spawned denial of responsibility, as well as denial of the historic facts.

Recent developments in Holocaust denial has centered on events in Germany, France, Canada and the United States, locations where the rise of racial and ethnic issues has attracted considerable interest. Other countries in which revisionists have been active but less visible in seeking to make Holocaust denial a public issue are the United Kingdom, Australia, Sweden, Italy and South Africa.

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[3] Vernon McKenzie, "Atrocities in World War II--What We Can Believe," *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 19 (September 1942), pp. 268-276.

[4] George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971,* New York: Random House, 1972, Vol. I, p. 472.

[5] Konnilyn Feig argues that in addition to the six million Jews killed in the German camps an additional five million non-Jews were also slaughtered including Gypsy families, homosexuals, Poles, Slavs, Slovaks, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Russians and anyone else considered by the Third Reich to be "subhuman." See Konnilyn Feig, "Non-Jewish Victims in the Concentration Camps," *A Mosaic of Victims*, ed. Michael Berenbaum, New York: New York University Press, 1990, p.162

[6] Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945,* New York: The Free Press, 1986, pp. 250-251.

In the United States, the media, as well as public libraries and universities, have been favorite targets for the ideological arguments of those who promote their alternative accounts of the Holocaust. A database search of 25 metropolitan U.S. newspapers beginning in the early 1980s verifies that news coverage of Holocaust denial has been sporadic, usually based on public protests, court proceedings, or infrequent public appearances of spokespeople for the revisionist movement. Yet, although news coverage about the issue is sparse, it is frequently followed by commentary or letters condemning the anti-Semitic motives of revisionists, and occasional editorials, which have been uniformly critical of Holocaust denial claims.[7]

Most of the recent coverage of the movement in the United States has been on college and university campuses, where representatives of groups loosely arguing for free expression have attempted to place Holocaust denial-related advertising in student publications. The most common advertisement was a 4,000-word essay signed by Bradley Smith of Visalia, California. The advertisement reads: "The figure of six million Jewish deaths is an irresponsible exaggeration. No execution gas chambers existed in Europe which was under German control." A subsequent advertisement raising questions about "Schindler's List" raised the same general claims.

The advertisements have been offered to student newspapers at dozens of American universities with mixed results. Yale, Harvard, Brown, Penn, Georgia, Wisconsin, Ohio State and the California are among the institutions which rejected the advertisement. An editorial explaining the rejection in *The Daily* at University of Washington recognized the conundrum the student newspaper was being drawn into:

> Unfortunately, the group behind the advertisement may only benefit from any controversy raised. Even student journalists who devoted their efforts to refuting the advertiser's arguments with historical articles reported ended up feeling 'used'. We do not want to be used. However, the fact that this group has been pushing these ideas on college campuses all over the nation *is* an issue of

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[7] A database search located only seventeen articles which contained the phrase "Holocaust denial " in 25 major U.S. newspapers. Most newspapers files on-line begin in 1982-1985.

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> importance.... We do not believe this issue can or should be completely ignored.[8]

Cornell, Duke, Northwestern and Michigan, are among about three dozen universities which published the group's statement as advertisements. Significant protests followed at several campuses. Peter Hayes, a history professor at Northwestern University wrote a published response to the claims, emphasizing:

> Make no mistake, freedom of inquiry or speech is decidedly *not* the issue posed by Smith's ad any more than historical accuracy is. [They] remain free to pen nastiness and get it printed and mailed to anyone. Their First Amendment rights, however, do not compel either a university or a newspaper to provide them platforms.[9]

The editor of the Duke *Chronicle* decided the denial claims fell within the range of normal historical inquiry: "What the revisionists are doing is reinterpreting history, a practice that occurs constantly, especially on a college campus." The faculty of the history department at Duke disagreed:

> The *Chronicle* editors make a serious error when they confuse Holocaust deniers with historical revisionists. Whatever one thinks about the right of the [newspaper] to accept this advertisement, as historians, we deplore this effort to use the language of 'scholarship' to distort and obliterate an event which, to our everlasting shame, did occur.[10]

The Daily Texan, the student newspaper at the University of Texas at Austin, published a Holocaust denial advertisement on February 19, 1993. The advertisement was submitted by a group calling itself the "Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust." The advertisement was an open letter questioning an earlier decision by the university's publication board to refuse to print a previously-submitted advertisement. The board accepted the Feb. 19 advertisement because it was essentially "content neutral," that is, it was not judged to contain misleading or slanderous information.[11] The newspaper publications board subsequently refused requests to print additional advertisements. The Holocaust denial group challenged the newspaper's decision by displaying a large protest sign on the side of a trailer on a street outside the newspaper's offices.

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[8] *The Daily,* The University of Washington, March 4, 1993.
[9] *The Daily Northwestern,* April 11, 1991.
[10] Statement approved at Duke History Department meeting, Nov. 8, 1991.
[11] Personal conversation with *The Daily Texan* General Manager Richard Lytle, March 29, 1993.

The Anti-defamation League condemned the advertisement in *The Daily Texan*: "No newspaper...is obliged to accept advertising whose main purpose is to spread hatred, to promote anti-Semitism and to reduce the victims of one of the most tragic chapters in human history to numbers on a ledger that can be deleted at will."[12]

The argument in favor of openness to "ugly ideas" was advanced by a house editorial published in *The New York Times.*[13] The editorial called the Holocaust denial advertisement "trash," but reasoned that the ideas of those who claim the Holocaust did not happen should be put before the public and refuted by the interplay of free discussion, not hidden away to return in more virulent forms. Recognizing that newspapers, including *The New York Times,* occasionally reject objectionable ads, the editorial provided no resolution to the dilemma. "There's probably no right answer to the question about how they [student newspapers] should decide.... To require that it [the Holocaust] be discussed only within approved limits may do an even greater injustice.... When there is free expression, even the ugliest ideas enrich democracy."[14]

Revisionists have promoted their thesis in a variety of other public fora, including courtroom testimony and scholarly-like historical publications. They often appeal specifically to the right of free speech and sense of fairness of journalists to present a legitimate point of view. The dilemma, as portrayed by Jeffrey Katz:

> Once we acknowledge the [Holocaust denial] to be nothing more than thinly disguised hate literature, we deepen the entire controversy...to present a balanced collection of material representing "all points of view on current and historical issues," there are some very real problems...when a book's particular "point of view" is at once distorted, constructed upon a foundation of lies, and intentionally harmful to others.[15]

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[12] Mark E. Wise and Barbara B. Harberg, *The Houston Chronicle*, Feb. 28, 1993, Viewpoints, p. 3.
[13] *New York Times*, Jan. 15, 1992, P. A-20.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Jeffrey Katz, "Revisionist History in the Library: To Facilitate Access or Not to Facilitate Access," *Canadian Library Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 5, Oct. 1991, p. 320.

The Claims of Revisionists

Promoters of Holocaust denial find their inspiration in the writings of Paul Rassinier, a socialist and former parliamentarian, who was a prisoner in Buchenwald for his involvement in the French Resistance. Also important to the movement were American writers Harry E. Barnes and David L. Hoggan. Hoggan wrote a 1948 Harvard doctoral dissertation on the antecedents of the Second World War and subsequently published *The Myth of the Six Million*, the first revisionist book to appear in English. The denial movement has gained much public exposure by reducing its arguments to the challenge of how many Jews might, or might not, have died during the war.

The primary source of Holocaust denial literature has been the Institute for Historical Review which publishes material from this uniquely revisionist perspective. The institute publishes a quarterly *Journal of Historical Review*, a semiquarterly newsletter, and has issued such books as *Debunking the Genocide Myth* (1978) and others.

In *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century* (1975), A.R. Butz, a professor of electrical engineering at Northwestern University, offered a revisionist version of the Holocaust as a popular and sinister lie: "I not only became convinced that the legend of several million gassed Jews must be a hoax, but I derived what turned out to be a fairly reliable 'feel' for the remarkable cabalistic mentality that had given the lie its specific form."[16]

The response to Butz's book has been pointed: "It is as obscenely distorted as the more crudely propagandistic works, but potentially more damaging because it clothes itself in an aura of scholarship. To the uninitiated, it may appear objective, reasonable, and even persuasive."[17]

Many newspapers covered the criminal prosecutions of two Holocaust challenges in Canada in the mid-1980s. James Keegstra, a public school teacher in Alberta, was prosecuted under the criminal code provisions prohibiting the dissemination of hate propaganda under the Canadian Human Rights Act.[18] Similar provisions exist under the Customs Tariff Act and the Canada Post Act. More recently, group defamation legislation has been developed in some of the provinces which permit civil suits by groups that have been the victims of hate propaganda.

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[16] A.R. Butz, *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century,* Torrance, Calif.: The Noontide Press, 1977, p. 7.

[17] Raldoph L. Braham, "Historical Revisionism and the New Right," *Remembering the Future,* Vol. 2, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989, pp. 2095-2096.

[18] *New York Times*, May 26, 1983, p. A-2; March 27, 1985, p. A-14; July 21, 1985, p. 5.

Ernst Zundel, a pro-Nazi publisher in Toronto was convicted in 1985 under an anti-hate law of "spreading false news" in a pamphlet that discussed the Holocaust. The law which dates back to the 19th Century, prohibits the spreading of rumors or news. The law stated: "Every one who willfully publishes a statement, tale or news that he knows is false and that causes or is likely to cause injury or mischief to a public interest is guilty of an indictable offense and is liable to imprisonment for two years."[19]

During his seven-week trial, the German-born Zundel presented a series of witnesses who claimed the Holocaust was a hoax. Outside the courtroom, Zundel's supporters clashed with the Jewish Defense League. In August 1992, the Canadian Supreme Court overturned Zundel's conviction because of the law's "undefined and virtually unlimited reach," but the court of public opinion was still in session. McGill University law professor Irwin Cotler noted that media coverage of so-called "expert witnesses" at Zundel's trial unduly influenced at least one-third of his students to doubt the historical accuracy of Jewish deaths during the Holocaust.[20]

News coverage of criminal court proceedings was not likely to evoke sympathy, according to a study by Gabriel Weimann and Conrad Winn.[21] Those who were most inclined to be sympathetic were those least likely to use the media to follow the news coverage.

In the United States there have been few court cases directly about Holocaust denial, but there is an active legal debate over the validity of hate speech statutes. The legal arguments revolve around the prohibition of hate speech because it violates the presumption of "civility of discourse." Law professor Charles Lawrence argued the "regulation of racist fighting words should not be treated differently that the regulation of garden variety fighting words, and captive audiences deserve no less protection when they are held captive by racist speakers."[22] On the other extreme, Mari Matsuda pointed to the "real historical costs of state intolerance of minority views" and

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[19] Id. 177 (1970).

[20] Cotler spoke at the Canada-Israel Law Conference at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Dec. 21, 1992.

[21] Gabriel Weimann and Conrad Winn, *Hate on Trial*, New York: Mosaic Press, 1986.

[22] Charles R. Lawrence III, "If He Hollers Let Him Go: Regulating Racist Speech on Campus, *Duke Law Journal*, 1990, p. 438.

"the need to strengthen our dangerously fickle collective commitment to freedom of discourse."[23]

In 1992, the U.S. Supreme Court decided a landmark case of R.A.V. v. City of St. Paul, involving a city "bias-motivated crime ordinance" which resulted in prosecution for burning a cross on the lawn of a Black family. The majority ruling found that ordinance was unconstitutional because such bans cannot discriminate on the basis of the viewpoint of the expression involved. It is not clear to what extent government regulation of hate speech remains permissible after R.A.V. v. City of St. Paul.[24]

However, many people feared the publicity of prosecution of offenders would give the Holocaust denial movement a level of publicity they sought. Many feared such trials provided a platform for racist and Nazi rhetoric to recruit sympathizers.

The worst fears were realized in France in the show trial of Professor Robert Faurisson, a former member of the faculty at the University of Lyon. Emerging as one of the leading figures of the denial, Faurisson has been at the center of controversy in France since 1978. He is author of *The Case of the Gas Chambers* in which he maintains that "the gas chambers of [Auschwitz] did not exist" and that the Holocaust was an "historical lie that permitted a gigantic political-financial swindle."[25]

At the end of a trial that erupted in fist fights, Faurisson was convicted under a French law specifically prohibiting Holocaust denial in public. He was found guilty on a civil statute brought by eight organizations for causing "a moral injury to those who were subjected, either personally or by the disappearance of members of their families, to the ordeals of the concentration camp regime and who are still alive to testify thereto."[26] He had accused inmates of the camps of lying about the camps' existence and the purpose of the gas chambers. Further, the court found his writings inspired "others to follow his line with the intention of justifying war crimes or inciting racial hatred."[27] The court fined Faurisson the equivalent of $18,000 and he was ordered to pay $3,600 to each of nine human rights groups who filed complaints leading to the prosecution. A magazine, *Shock of the Month,* which published Faurisson's assertion that Hitler's gas chambers were a mere fabrication, was fined $55,000.

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[23] Mari J. Matsuda, "Public Response to Racist Speech: Considering the Victim's Story, *Michigan Law Review*, 87, p. 2320.

[24] Michael J. Gerhardt and Thomas D. Rowe, Jr., *Constitutional Theory: Arguments and Perspectives*, Charlottesville, VA: The Michie Co., 1993.

[25] Faurisson is quoted in William Gleberzon, "Academic Freedom and Holocaust Denial Literature: Dealing with Infamy," *Interchange*, Vol. 14 No. 1, 1983, p. 65.

[26] *Le Monde*, July 18, 1981, p. 10.

[27] Ibid.

French right-wing politician Jean-Marie Le Pen also lost an appeal on a conviction for casting doubt on the existence of the Nazi gas chambers. His original court fine was 1 franc, but later an Appeals Court ordered him to pay 100,000 francs ($60,000) to each of nine separate human rights groups which brought the complaint. In spite of these setbacks, the French wing of the revisionists succeeded in gaining considerable access to the mainline press and entangling academic historians in the debate over Holocaust ovens.

Germany has confronted its own turbulent anti-Semitic history and the excesses of the Third Reich by writing laws trying to balance free speech with the values of human dignity and personal honor. The German Criminal Code contain provisions outlawing political organizations and activities hostile to the "Basic Law" which arguably would not stand up to constitutional standards of the American courts.

The resurgence of neo-Nazi activities in Germany inspired the latest reform of the Criminal Code in 1985 based on the so-called "Auschwitz lie." The principal argument in the debate over the code has not been between free speech and security, as one might expect. The new law has restricted freedom of speech more than ever before on the basis that the law and the courts have a significant role to fulfill in protecting against the "infamous" and the "ignorant" who propagate Holocaust denial in public discourse.[28]

In Holocaust scholarship, broadly speaking, there are two positions regarding the intentions of Hitler and his regime concerning the fate of the Jews. First, militant intentionalists argue that Hitler was committed from the beginning to the single-minded idea that the Jews must be eliminated. At the other extreme, functionalists give credence to historical evidence that the Holocaust was an evolving concept which emerged over time when initial schemes did not go as originally planned.

In either case, the response to Holocaust denial has been guided by an assumption among many established scholars, both within and outside of Judaism, that the claims of Holocaust revisionists are too profane to dignify with a rebuttal. Wiesel said in the early 1980s: "I don't even like to dignify this issue by discussing it."[29] A decade later, the Simon Wiesenthal Center based in Los Angeles was distributing alerts about the tactics of the Holocaust denial organizers and other anti-Semitic groups.

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[28] Eric Stein, "History Against Free Speech: The New German Law Against the 'Auschwitz'-- and other 'Lies'"' *Michigan Law Review*, Vol. 85, 1986-87, pp. 277-324.

The Consequences of Denial

There has been a growing body of literature about the consequences of Holocaust denial, much of which is over determined by its sponsor's political and religious commitments. Very few who take the debate seriously are not already committed to its outcome. Because there is so much at stake, Jewish responses are typically emotion-laden. Even honest efforts at historical scholarship that are not clearly sympathetic to the Jewish cause are dismissed as falling unwittingly into neo-Nazi hands. As one writer stated it, the campaign against the Holocaust is unwittingly supported by "sometimes even respected scholars,"[30] who consciously or unconsciously contribute to the opponent's cause.

Because of the charged climate of opinion there is a considerable level of risk in reinterpreting war history pertaining to the Jews. Richard von Weizsacker, president of West Germany in 1986, told the Bundestag the nation should not forget: "All of us must accept the past. We are all affected by the consequences and liable for it.... Whoever refuses to remember the inhumanity is prone to new risks of infection."[31]

Two controversial publications attracted considerable attention in Germany in the late 1980s for favorably reinterpreting National Socialism and offending the Jewish memory. Andreas Hillgruber, a historian at Cologne University, wrote of the barbarism of Soviet troops in killing two million Germans. The German people should "identify" with the valiant German soldiers who defended their country's eastern territories.

Ernst Nolte, another historian, published an article in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, developing the thesis that National Socialism must be seen as a reaction to the "Bolshevik actions of annihilation" in the 1930's in the Soviet Union and earlier. Nolte wrote that the history of Germany's experience in the early 20th Century must be revised because it was written largely by the victors and was transformed into a "state supported myth." He argued further that Hitler had reason to believe the Jews wished to annihilate him, citing a "declaration of war" proclaimed by Zionist Chaim Weizmann in 1939. Weizmann, a leading Zionist who helped found the state of Israel, had appealed to Jews to fight on the side of England. "This fact might justify the consequential thesis that Hitler was allowed to treat the German Jews as prisoners of war and by this means to intern them," Nolte wrote.

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[29] *Boston Globe*, Dec. 20, 1981.
[30] Yisrael Gutman, "The Denial of the Holocaust and Its Consequences," *Remembering for the Future*, Vol. 2, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989, p. 2116.
[31] *The New York Times*, Nov. 16, 1986, p. 30.

Jurgen Habermas, an intellectual descendent of the Frankfurt School of critical social theory, was drawn into the dispute over Hillgruber and Nolte's approach to revisionism. In *Die Zeit* Habermas described himself "outraged to the core" and denounced the "grossly apologetic tendencies" of these historians. He was particularly incensed at the use of revisionist themes in the cause of creating a new, patriotic German identity among the second and third post-war generation. While Habermas had defended student uprisings in the 1960's, he denounced the "fascism of the left" which glossed National Socialism's unequivocal responsibility for the atrocities of the Holocaust.[32]

Another person criticized frequently for providing encouragement to the revisionist cause is MIT professor Noam Chomsky, who wrote a defense of free expression which appeared as a preface for a Holocaust denial book written by Faurisson. Chomsky insisted later he didn't intend the essay to be published in the book: "[The Holocaust] was the most fantastic outburst of collective insanity in human history. One degrades oneself even entering a discussion of it."[33] Still, Chomsky defended the fundamental position that everyone has the right to address it.

A rebuttal to Chomsky's liberal position, and to his essay specifically, was written by French historian Vidal-Naquet, who observed correctly that revisionism occurs at the intersection of various and occasionally contradictory ideologies.[34] He condemned Chomsky for his duplicity in promoting revisionism, while at the same time accusing radical Zionists of exploiting the Holocaust "in a manner that is on occasion scandalous."[35]

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[32] Ibid.
[33] *Boston Globe,* Dec. 20, 1981.
[34] Ibid.

Vidal-Naquet's defense of the Jewish genocide went beyond Chomsky's offense to his analysis of denial geography. Even further, Vidal-Naquet identified the center of the "revisionist International" in California: "There is nothing surprising about all this: it is simply the result of the planetary circulation of information and dominant position of the United States in the world market."[36] While it is evident there have been denial groups operating in California, it was the leadership in the American film industry in Hollywood which labeled German Nazis as the "enemy" figure in film plots in the early 1940s.[37] After earlier uncertainty, the movie producers then began depicting the Nazi persecution of the Jews and portrayed the contribution of Jews to the war effort.[38] The heroic themes of resistance and salvation have continued even into the 1990s.

Denial as a Political Strategy

The psychology of denial follows its own logic, and is not isolated to the Jewish experience. Turkey has engaged in a vigorous campaign to deny its role in the Armenian massacre of 1915 in spite of a vast collection of eyewitness and media evidence to the contrary. As part of the Turkish campaign, letters were sent from the Turkish government directly to secondary schools in the United States, urging them to exclude from classroom discussion the Armenian genocide. The Turkish government organized a campaign to influence the state of California to inject the Turkish view in school textbooks. The Turkish government also intervened in the U.S. Senate in an attempt to defeat a resolution for the commemoration of the Armenian genocide. UCLA historian Leo Kuper explained:

> None of these...interventions by the Turkish government would be of the least significance if it were not for complicity in the outside world. It is this complicity that is beginning to cast doubt on an

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[35] Ibid, p. 16.

[36] Ibid, p. 86.

[37] The motion picture producers also sponsored a series of short-wave broadcasts to South America in 1939 promoting the benefits of artistic freedom in an effort to slow the tide of totalitarian restrictions of Hollywood movies.

[38] Short, K.R.M., "Hollywood Fights Anti-Semitism, 1945-1947," in K.R.M. Short (Ed.), *Feature Films as History,* London: Croom Helm, 1981, pp. 157-189.

> incontrovertible genocide, abundantly established...by eyewitness accounts, the dispatches of diplomats, and the world press.[39]

Scholars have also sought to account for the uneven public attention paid to this and other historic episodes of genocide, persecution and atrocity. Steven T. Katz has compared the Holocaust with the medieval witchcraft trials, the destruction of North American Indians, Black slavery, persecution of Europe's Gypsies, among others.[40] Other historians suggest American political and diplomatic policies arise from the ambiguity of the mistreatment of racial and ethnically distinct groups within the nation's own boundaries.[41] This ambiguity renders both the government and its citizens vulnerable to the political struggle for various forms of recognition and aid.

Those who raise these questions about the fate of Jews in World War II, tap into an array of inconsistent responses among Jews themselves. For some the crime was not a Jewish one as much as it was universal. Some writers suggest the Holocaust changed everything because the impossible became possible. Michael Ryan, for example, has argued, "After Auschwitz [a] rather linear progressivist view of world history is impossible."[42] Others who have examined the attitudes of the second generation of Jewish survivors and descendants find the responses include isolation of affect, denial, horror, guilt, anger at the world, and anger at their parents for subjecting them to the horrors of past generations.[43]

Claims in the Service of Ideology

In its broadest terms, the problem presented by Holocaust denial is not entirely unique. Historiography has frequently been the handmaiden of the state, or other hegemonic influence. James Shotwell, a Columbia University historian and the founding chair of the National Board for Historical Service in World War I, was intimately involved in the effort in the United States to mobilize historians for patriotic objectives. The board helped to organize sought to establish liaisons with state archives and libraries to influence the creation of an official record of World War I. These historians agreed their combined efforts would be used for "patriotic and educational ends"[44] and were largely unhindered by any need to maintain a sense of historical distance. Shotwell wrote in 1917:

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[39] Leo Kuper, "When Denial Becomes Routine," *Social Education*, Vol. 55, No. 2, (February 1991), pp. 121-123.

[40] Steven T. Katz, "Quantity and Interpretation: Issues in the Comparative Historical Analysis of the Holocaust," *Remembering for the Future*, Vol. 3, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989, pp. 2510-2526.

[41] Jack Norton, "Moral Decay: The Fetid Fruits of Genocide," *Remembering for the Future*, Vol. 2, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989.

[42] Michael D. Ryan, "The Holocaust as the Question of Human Being," *Human Respones to the Holocaust: Perpetrators and Victims, Bystanders and Resisters*, Ed. Michael D. Ryan, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979; see also Randolph L. Braham, Ed., *Contemporary View on the Holocaust,* Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, 1983.

[43] Robert M. Prince, *The Legacy of the Holocaust: Psychohistorical Themes in the Second Generation*, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985.

> Nothing is more enlightening than to see how the interest of [an historian] shifts from things as they were to things as they should be. Once he has assumed the latter attitude, his next step is to study how he can influence the largest number of people to take his point of view, and this leads to embellishment of the text and manipulation of the content.[45]

The National Board of Historical Service provided background information for many of the documents used by the Committee on Public Information and helped it to develop into a powerful nationalizing agency in 1917-18.[46]

Historical revisionism was promulgated by New Left historians on the philosophical foundations of historical relativists such as Charles Beard and Benedetto Croce and became the methodology of choice of many historians of the 1960s. Such revisionism arises out of the discovery of new documents, or a new perspective of the past related to changing circumstances and points of view.[47] Most historians defend revisionist history as a legitimate practice, even though the term was coopted for use by Holocaust denial. William H. Chafe, chair of the Duke history department, affirmed: "Assertions denying the Holocaust are different from the kind of revisionism that scholars normally do. Scholarly revisionism is not concerned with the actuality of events, but only with interpretations of their causes and consequences."[48]

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[44] Harold Josephson, *James T. Shotwell and the Rise of Internationalism in America*, (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1975), p. 52.

[45] Stephen Vaughn, *Holding Fast the Inner Lines*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), p. 221.

[46] Ibid., p. 233.

[47] William Gleberzon, "Academic Freedom and Holocaust Denial Literature: Dealing with Infamy," *Interchange*, Vol. 14, No. 4, Vol. 15. No. 5, 1983-84, pp. 62-69.

[48] *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Dec. 14, 1991, p. A-10.

Until the late stages of the Cold War, the Holocaust was largely relegated to Jewish historians, perhaps because historians as a group were uncomfortable with confronting the historic phenomena of sociopathology. Historians, like others in the human and social sciences, sometimes suffer from a rationalist perversion of sound judgment, seeking plausible explanations of irrational acts. As Dawidowicz explained: "Except for a handful of first-rate scholars and thinkers, the place, the function, and the operation of mass psychopathology in human history has been ignored and neglected."[49]

The Holocaust denial movement is now regarded by Dawidowicz as another chapter in the sometimes bizarre psychopathology in human history that sought to alter consciousness. There have been other wars, even wars of hideous and obscene consequences, but the destruction of European Jews was unique because it was an end unto itself. Or, the ends and means were identical.

From another perspective, Ephraim Buchwald has argued the preoccupation with the Holocaust has disenchanted many people, among them Jews. Two million American Jews no longer acknowledge being Jewish and one million Jewish children are being raised as non-Jews.[50] Many still affirm, however, the Holocaust experience speaks vividly to the Jewish experience and is a key in an intensification of Jewish identity. As stated by Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust represents the legacy of racial and ethnic suffering: "We are a people of history. I think we have invented historicity if not history. I belong to a people that remembers. No other people remembers as well both our friends and our enemies as we do."[51]

Defining the Ethical Dilemma

The intersection of the Holocaust denial movement and the mass media raises issues that are not easily solved by merely appealing to the language of the First Amendment, that the press is guaranteed the right to free speech. Competing virtues compel journalists and editors to take a closer look at how they must deal with controversial issues while at the same time remaining loyal to personal and social prescriptions.

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[49] Lucy S. Dawidowitz, "The Holocaust as Historical Record," *Dimensions of the Holocaust,*, Elie Wiesel, Lucy S. Dawidowitz, Dorothy Rabinowitz, Robert McAfee Brown, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1990, p. 30.

[50] Los Angeles Times, April 28, 1992, p. B-7.

[51] Op. cite, p. 5.

The major ethical issues in this case are at the heart of "free speech," namely, how should the media treat the simple phrase "free expression" because in an ethical sense the phrase is much more complex. Should the media take an informationalist or libertarian position, or does social responsibility compel journalists to protect the public from information--legitimate or not--that might cause considerable pain? These competing virtues seem to collide over Holocaust denial and comprise the heart of the dilemma .

The problems associated with the media and its relationship with the Holocaust run deep and are not new as is evident in Evelyn Kennerly's indictment of the World War II press coverage of the Holocaust. According to Kennerly, "The media committed...[an] ethical violation by failing in their traditional role of informing the American people so they could make up their minds about a controversial issue and decide what steps to pressure the government to take." [52] Kennerly further attributes these ethical mistakes made by the American media at the time to its extreme cynicism that caused it to become a "tool of the German propaganda machine."[53] Other's criticism of the way the media handled the Holocaust in World War II has been just as sharp. David Wyman claims that several hundred thousand Jews could have been saved from untimely death had the media handled its coverage of the Holocaust more effectively. Wyman asserts that the growth of public pressure to save Holocaust victims was stupefied by "the mass media's failure to publicize Holocaust news."[54]

While the current dilemma of how to deal with the Holocaust denial controversy is not an alleged life and death one, it certainly has the potential to affect many lives. The controversy is more than a hypothetical case study for media ethics enthusiasts, and it is more than a gratuitous exercise in how to best deal with "hard-to-cover" issues. Deborah Lipstadt affirms her belief the Holocaust denial movement has enough momentum to cause justified concern.[55] But even she concedes that the impact of Holocaust denial is "probably quite limited." While the premise of the Holocaust denial movement may seem to many to be too outlandish to believe, studies as recent as April, 1993, indicate that perhaps as many as twenty percent of United States high school students and twenty-two percent of adults think it seems possible that the Holocaust never happened, or at least it never happened as portrayed in popular accounts.[56]

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[52] Evelyn Kennerly, "Mass Media & Mass Murder: American Coverage of the Holocaust," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, Vol. 2, No.1, Fall/Winter 1986-87, 68.

[53] Ibid.

[54] David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945*. New York: Patheon Books, 1984, p.x-xi.

A representative for Liberty Lobby, a distributor of Holocaust denial literature based in Torrence, California, affirmed: "We're not arguing the [detention] camps weren't there. What we're arguing against is that there was the planned destruction of Jewish people by Nazis. And we dispute the six million figure. We know that, mathematically, that couldn't have happened."[57]

Even short of conversion of world-wide opinion, the doubts repeated often enough have begun to take a toll. As James Dalrymple writes in the London *Times:*

> Throughout Europe and the United States there are murmurings of a denial so gross and bizarre that at first, like a dirty joke told in church, they dumbfound and alarm the senses. But in an age addicted to conspiracy theories, whispers of the denial are beginning to seep into the consciousness of generations not born when the crime was being committed, whose only knowledge comes via horror films, pulp fiction and a folk memory...."[58]

Media ethics are at the center of this hotbed of debate concerning how the media ought to best deal with the controversy, and for a number of valid reasons. The media is seen by some as the cause of the debate's ongoing fire, by others as the very fuel of the flame, and still others say it is neither; rather, they say the media is simply standing over the blaze wondering if it ought to tell others about the inferno or quell the fire and quietly walk away. But the critics' view of how the media handles the Holocaust denial controversy hits at the real concern. An ethical equilibrium must be found that will allow the media to deal effectively with such a confusing and potentially pain-filled subject. To find an ethical equilibrium that will allow the media to deal effectively with such an issue, journalists and editors cannot resort to decision by default. In the words of one media ethicist: "[M]ass communicators must decide for themselves, rather than having other imperatives thrust upon them, what messages they will distribute and what form they will take."[59]

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[55] Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, New York: The Free Press, 1993.
[56] *New York Times Book Review*, July 11, 1993, section 7.
[57] Tom Marcellus, director of the Institute for Historical Review, in an interview with Robert Levey of the *Boston Globe*, published Dec. 20, 1981.
[58] *London Times*, July 26, 1992.

Media journalists generally construe news to be synonymous with information *per se*. Most journalists claim to be guided by journalistic principles of accuracy, balance, fairness and timeliness. In fact, the journalist's stated purpose is to be the carrier of public discussion and information, and that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice; therefore, journalists are to perform with intelligence, objectivity, accuracy, and fairness.[60] These principles do not always lend themselves to tidying-up ethical messes, however. The nature and breadth of the Holocaust denial controversy often pits theses principles against each other.

The media are confronted with a host of ethical questions that are not remedied easily or simply. Competing virtues ask if information should be disseminated openly, or if the media should deny coverage and not subject the victims of the Holocaust to revictimization. Bernard Gert, for one, argues for moral rules as guideposts. One such rule is: "don't cause pain." However, this maxim collides with countervening rules, for example: "do your duty." But even Gert allows: "Toward each . . . [moral] rule, the following public attitude would be taken by all rational men: 'Everyone is always to obey the rule except when he could publicly advocate violating it. Anyone who violates the rule when he could not publicly advocate such a violation may be punished."[61]

One critical position argues that if journalists are to hold true to their most basic codes, then the intent of those denying the Holocaust must be weighed; for if the Holocaust deniers' intents are honestly and justifiably held beliefs, the media is obligated to take them seriously. Conversely, it may be argued, to permit access to the media by revisionists is, at best, stretching the historical facts, and, at worst, extending the basis of fascist ideology and its crimes against humanity. Revisionists may know what damage can be caused in the public mind to the cause of truth simply by raising the question of historicity.

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[59] Ralph Barney, "On the Moral Law," Mass Media Ethics and Issues. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, p. 48.

[60] The Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, Code of Ethics.

[61] Bernard Gert, *The Moral Rules: A New Rational Foundational for Morality*, New York: Harper.

For the journalist, either choice is potentially an "act of conscience" fraught with moral, political and legal contradictions. To deny media access to *any* claimant violates a premise of equal and open access because it closes a potential avenue to truth. But Holocaust denial, as Pierre Vidal-Naquet put it, pushes the discussion toward "neither truth nor science," but into the rhetorical swamp of political gamesmanship in which the players constantly change and suspend the rules at will.[62] In fact, Holocaust revisionists are often placed in a public position of arguing for "free speech" to expound their points of view, against the moral outrage of Holocaust survivors and witnesses who find no redeeming value in their testimony.

Even while historical revisionists have made a few legitimate historical points, which they exploit, they are routinely dismissed by detractors as a gang of charlatans, pseudo intellectuals and Nazi sympathizers. As one observer described it, those who deny the historicity of the Holocaust "misconstrue" and "misrepresent" history by denying either that the Holocaust ever occurred or by relegating it to a footnote in World War II history.[63] This concern comes closer to the essentialist argument which lies behind much of the thinking in the debate: what is the truth? Either the Holocaust happened or it didn't. If the evidence indeed speaks to its historicity, are journalists and editors committing a moral offense themselves by insisting on impartiality?

In terms of whether revisionism deserves media coverage, even indecision is a choice on behalf of indifference. It was, in fact, the same kind of indecision by the United States government which made it vulnerable to criticism for failing to act quickly during World War II to save thousands of victims of Nazi concentration camps.[64] The American indifference to the genocide of European Jews in the Holocaust has been described by Arthur

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[62] Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of Memory*, trans. by Jeffrey Mehlman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 8.
[63] Gerald Tishler, "Freedom of Speech and Holocaust Denial," *Cardozo Law Review* , Vol. 8 No. 3, Feb. 1987, 559-594.
[64] The sequence of events which led to U.S. military action on the European front was the result of many decisions facing the Roosevelt Administration early in World War II. Whether and how many Jewish lives might have been saved by alternative courses of action is widely discussed in Holocaust studies.

Morse[65] and David Wyman[66] as morally condemnable. They attributed part of the blame to a White House which failed to address the Holocaust swiftly, an American public which refused to believe the reports of atrocities, and with contending Jewish groups which disagreed among themselves about the nature of the threat and its consequences. Whether a direct, affirmative American military response might have rescued victims of the camps is vigorously debated among various writers. Wyman, in particular, believes the United States shares in the responsibility for abandoning the Jews to their fate because there is a strong humanitarian impulse within American society which could have been engaged to overcome the domestic resistance to European intervention.

More sympathetically, Frank Brecher[67] has pointed out that what some have interpreted as American indifference could be interpreted as merely caution, or even uncertainty:

> The controversy...with the [extermination] plan was not whether the Jews were being killed on a large scale, or not. This was an established and widely reported fact, which, in principle, morally called for an Allied response.... Rather, the specific question was whether the Germans had decided as was being reported from the summer of 1942 on, to annihilate a whole people, "at one blow" that very year; some of the reports even charged the Germans with making soap out of Jewish bodies. The Roosevelt Administration was not alone in its initial skepticism regarding these reports. The Jewish Agency in Palestine, for example, was as skeptical--and for a longer period of time--as Washington. This widespread disbelief was an understandable reaction at a time when there was not even a word in human language for the extermination of a whole people, "genocide" being coined only later in the war. Furthermore, the Allies were naturally wary of repeating their First World War embarrassment of reporting as fact various rumors of enemy atrocities, rumors which most often proved to be false.

Journalists and editors should share also the lessons learned by historians in the function of revisionist claims. While some of these lessons are controversial, they are strategies which have parallels in claims-making activities of the mass media. Among the strategic approaches to revisionism are:

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[65] Arthur Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy*, New York: Random House, 1967.

[66] David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews and the Holocaust, 1941-1945*, New York: Pantheon, 1984.

[67] Frank W. Brecher, "David Wyman and the Historiography of America's Response to the Holocaust: Counter-considerations," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 435.

•Revision through comparison. One can argue that Stalin killed more people than Hitler; as many as 300-500 thousand Sinti and Roma (gypsies) were killed by the Nazis[68]; the United States dropped atomic bombs on Japan; Pol Pot committed genocide in Cambodia, etc. The stark comparison of war acts and atrocities tends to diffuse the unique culpability of the Third Reich for atrocities against Jews.

•Revision through deflection. This might be achieved by describing the periphery instead of the core offense. Much of life among the German population, even the Nazis, during the war was routine and normal, to a degree. By emphasizing the normalcy of daily life under the Third Reich, it is easy to lose touch with the inhumanity of their state policies.

•A third revisionist strategy, *schlusstrich*, requires the drawing of a line at the bottom of an account. In historical terms, that means closing the book on the atrocities because of the utter collapse of the Third Reich and its political ideology. The recent political and economic turmoil in Europe precipitated by "skinheads" and other neo-Nazis have demonstrated clearly enough the survival of the National Socialist ideals. Racial, ethnic and religious hatred are not problems which disappear through the passage of time alone.

•Revision can be achieved through inversion, or portraying perpetrators as victims and victims as either knowing or unwitting perpetrators of their own misfortune. Following this kind of argument, Jews brought the specter of genocide upon themselves either as a kind of perverse death wish, or through the treacherous acts of a few who led the race to its destruction, or through their passive acceptance of their fate.

For Lucy Dawidowicz, a leading Holocaust historian: "Every historical subject has undergone revision as each new generation rewrites the history of the past in the light of its own perspective and values."[69] Yet, once revision becomes *revisionism*, it enters into a sphere of distortion in which the primary motivation is the advancement of a personal, and sometimes bizarre, ideological position. Journalists should be sensitive to such a transformation in deciding the strength of claims.

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[68] Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 364.

[69] Lucy Dawidowicz, "Lies About the Holocaust," *Commentary*, 70, December 1980, pp. 31-37.

Summary/Conclusion

In a mediated society, news of such events as the Holocaust is often stripped of its emotional and religious impact. In news almost all social and political events can be expressed in information, not stories. The rise of the "information age" revolves around disembodied signifiers, while the story in general, and the Jewish epic in particular, is a field of signifiers. John Peters explained the chasm between information and story in terms of continuity: "Information brings no tokens of community, neither with other people nor with a community.... Information is granular. Making poetry out of information would be like weaving a braid out of sand."[70]

Television in particular cultivated the schism between story and information. There is little sacred in technology: "Technology governs the media and the modes of inscription of signifiers and is hence powerfully linked to human existence."[71] Thus, there is no direct way to represent the depth of the experience to bystanders. Wiesel recognized this dilemma:

> He or she who did not live through the event will never know it. And he or she who did live through the event will never reveal it. Not entirely. Not really. Between our memory and its reflection there stands a wall that cannot be pierced. The past belongs to the dead and the survivor does not recognize himself in the words linking him to them. We speak in code, we survivors, and this code cannot be broken, cannot be deciphered, not by you no matter how much you try.[72]

Even if the "code" cannot be broken, journalists can come closer to an appreciation of its meaning in the lives of those who give it life. The Holocaust is symbolic of the centuries of anti-Semitic persecution, motivated by "hatred of the Jewish people and determination to destroy them...." Still, the message of the denial persists. It is apparent that it is not the disputed facts which are at the center of the problem, but the collective memory of the Holocaust victims which has been desecrated by its denial. The diverse responses to the denial movement reflect the true emotional outrage which it taps in the Jewish consciousness. Even while many journalists are reluctant to be manipulated by provocation over Holocaust denial or free speech, they placed the topic of the Holocaust on the public agenda.

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[70] Peters, John, *The Sacred and Sociality*, unpublished master's thesis, University of Utah, Department of Communication, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1982, p. 167.
[71] Ibid, p. 166.
[72] Op cite, p. 7.

In terms of historic understanding, the persistent confrontation over the Holocaust denial movement places diverging accounts of historical events at odds with each other because there is no arbiter of historical facts outside the court of public opinion. Opponents begin the discussion from radically opposing ideological and emotional positions. Historical evidence is marshaled to support pre-existing social, political and religious values. Indeed, the controversy over Holocaust denial has never been as much a problem of fact, as it is one of the continuing struggle over affirmation of human values in the chaotic and disputed stream of events through public dialogue.

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The Third-Person Effect and Social Distance: Exploring who are the "others"

by

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The third-person effect hypothesis predicts "that people will tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on the attitudes and behavior of others" (Davison, 1983, p. 3). This hypothesis has been studied in a number of different contexts over the past 11 years. Perloff (1993) identified the four major factors that have been found to facilitate a third person effect: message topic, involvement with topic, source bias and social distance.

It is the concept of social distance, or who the third persons, or "others", are which has received little attention in third-person effect research. While there has been attention to different types of media messages and the presence of the third-person effect, there has been little effort to understand how one perceives others when attempting to estimate the effects of mass media upon them. The third-person effect is typically measured by the difference between the estimated effect of a media message on oneself, and the estimated effect of the message on each group of "others" provided (typically described with little information, such as "other students in this class"). Third-person effect research has considered the effect on "others" in general (Gunther and Mundy, 1993), or has provided levels of broadly defined groups of "others" at different levels of social distance, such as other students at the university, others in the state and others in general (Cohen and Davis, 1991; Gunther, 1991; Cohen, et al., 1988).

Perloff (1993) suggests that social distance is a "complex variable that includes various components, such as perceived similarity, familiarity and identification" (p. 175). Perloff distinguishes between two conceptualizations of social distance that may apply to third-person effect research. One interpretation suggests social distance falls along a continuum which ranges from "just like me" to "not at all like me." A second interpretation, which Perloff says has been used more often in third-person effect research, "reflects the heterogeneity and size of the audience or group in question" (p. 175-6). This continuum ranges from "my closest group or community" to "my largest group or community."

A different approach to test the limits of the third-person effect is to vary how "others" are described to respondents upon who they estimate the effect of a message. Previous research has looked at the social distance between oneself and groups of others. The third-person effect, however, may occur differently when others are described more specifically, as individuals. This project considers how the use of categorical or individuating information in describing others (versus referring to others by broad categories as typically studied).

This paper considers if the third-person effect remains when "others" are described by categorical or individuating information. If greater information on "others" is provided, or if others are identified as particular individuals, will respondents still estimate greater mass media effects on other people than themselves? Does more information provided about others diminish the third-person effect, or is the third-person effect prevalent regardless of the amount of information on others? It may be the case that when the "other" is a specific individual it may be more difficult to make assumptions and generalize about the person, and if the other individual is similar to the respondent, subjects may not estimate media effects all that differently from the effect on oneself. On the other hand, the more specifically a person is identified, the easier it may be for one to differentiate oneself from another person, knowing by the information provided "this person is not at all like me."

This approach in defining others does not necessarily fit into Perloff's two conceptualizations of social distance. The conceptualization of the continuum ranging from "just like me" to "not at all like me" may rely on perceived similarity or identification with others more than on familiarity. Measuring social distance by broad groups to tap this conceptualization may not suffice; however, if others were defined as specific individuals whom respondents can evaluate as like or unlike themselves, this may more adequately measure similarity. Evaluating how individuating and categorical information differ in social psychological research may provide clarification for how such information could be used to test the third-person effect hypothesis.

Research conducted by Krueger and Rothbart (1988) suggests differences may be found depending on the type of information provided in third-person effect research. While Krueger and Rothbart consider what information respondents use to "make inferences about people's attributes or about the causes of their behavior" (p. 187), third-person effect research asks respondents to estimate the effect on one's attitudes, which may be a more complex task. As Krueger and Rothbart suggest though, people "typically rely more on the specific properties of the stimulus person than on the general statistical properties of the class" (p. 187). The same may occur when people are asked to make estimates on the effect of mass media on individuals, in that individuating information may be more useful than general or categorical information. In using categorical and individuating information in describing others in third-person effect research, Krueger and Rothbart's findings suggest that individuating information may be more influential than categorical.

Kunda and Sherman-Williams (1993) argue that categorical information may affect the "construal" of individuating information, which suggests that categorical information does have influence even when individuating information is provided. They say "judgments made by people who base their impressions only on individuating information, regardless of the stereotype, can nevertheless be influenced by stereotypes if the individuating information is ambiguous and open to multiple, stereotype-driven construals" (p. 91). They found this to be the case and when individuating information was relevant and unambiguous, stereotypes did not affect judgments. Kunda and Sherman-Williams' findings might suggest if describing individuals does lead to different third-person effects than previously measured by general groups of others, then the differences might be greatest between general others and when unambiguous individuating information is provided.

Fiske, et al.'s (1987) approach to understanding category- based and attribute-based reactions to others may also help explain how the third-person effect may differ depending on how "others" are described. They suggest categorization is typically used but they found it is not successful when attributes do not fit a particular category label, or attributes do not cue a particular category. Their findings suggest when categorical information alone is provided, people use those categories to make inferences. When categorical and attribute information are both provided, a combination of categorical and attribute-based processing occurs. When applying Fiske et al.'s findings to the third-person effect, differences may be most likely found in the perceptions of media effects on others depending on the categorical and attribute based information provided and the consistency between them.

This project constitutes a preliminary test which considers to what extent different third person effect results are found depending on how the "others", the third persons, are defined. Support for a "strong" third person effect would be represented by significant differences between effect on self and effect on others regardless of how the others are defined or described, whether it be general others as has been used in previous third person effect research, or if instead others are described categorically or are individuated as specific people. This would suggest that regardless of who the "other" is, a person will overestimate the effect of mass media message on the "other".

On the other hand, if there are found to be different patterns of results if others are described differently than they have been defined in the past, this would question how likely is the third person effect to occur. If, for instance, the third person effect is supported when others are described as general groups as has been tested in the past, but there is no evidence support such an effect when others are described differently, these results would suggest the third person effect is limited when estimating the effects of mass media upon general groups of others rather than on specific individuals. It may be the case that as the "other" is more individuated, made more concrete, substantive, and realistic, the third-person effect declines because generalization and estimation of effects upon that other individual may be more difficult to do than upon groups of general others. On the other hand, because the individual is described and differentiated by details provided about the individual other, respondents may be more likely not to see that other person as similar in any way to themselves because the differences between them are much clearer than in the case of "other university students" or similarly broad groups in which little differentiation is provided. These potential differences are explored below.

The other questions examined in this study involve the importance of the issue to the respondent, and the opinion of the respondent prior to reading a particular message, and how these factors may influence the likelihood of third person effects occurring.

Method

Procedure

Subjects read two newspaper editorials and following each editorial they completed questions regarding the effect of the editorial. Subjects were randomly assigned surveys to complete, with questions of general others (N=26), categorical others (N=22) or individuated others (N=28). In addition to being asked to what extent the respective editorial affected their own opinion on the topic of the editorial, respondents were also asked how it would affect three "others" who varied by perceived similarity with the respondent. Undergraduate introductory journalism students participated for course credit.

Editorials

Subjects read two editorials on recent events, in which one discussed controversy surrounding the fate of the local professional basketball team which may be moved to another city. The other editorial discussed United States and Russian relations following discovering that Aldrich Ames was a spy, and what the United States' reaction should be, recommending aid to Russia not be cut in response. One half of students read the basketball editorial first, while the others read the spy editorial first, although no differences in responses were found related to editorial order.

Measurement

Effect of message on self. Once the first of the two editorials were read, subjects responded to the question, "How does the above editorial affect your opinion (about the team/on reaction about the spy)?" and indicated responses on a

7-point scale which ranged from "more in favor of saving team" to "more opposed to saving team" and from "more in favor in punishing Russia" to "more opposed to punishing Russia."

Effect of message on others. Following estimating the effect of the message on themselves, respondents then read the statement "we are also curious how you think other people would feel about this editorial", which was followed by a description of the other group or person. Subjects were then asked to estimate the effect of the editorial on the opinion of other people or groups for each of the three others described in the condition. They responded on 7-point scales which ranged from "more in favor of saving team" to "more opposed to saving team" and from "more in favor in punishing Russia" to "more opposed to punishing Russia." For the "general others" condition, respondents were asked to estimate the effect of the editorial on other university students, others in the state, and other people in general. For the "categorical others" condition, respondents were asked to estimate the effect of each editorial on the typical college student, the typical housewife, and the typical business executive. For the "individuated others" condition, respondents were asked to estimate the effect of each editorial on "Jeffrey, a senior in history...", "Cynthia, a computer programmer..." and "Joseph, who is retired from the military and now lives in Phoenix...".

Opinion on subject. Prior to reading either editorial, respondents were asked for their opinion on the topics of the subsequent editorials and responded on 6-point scales which ranged from "strongly in favor of saving the team" to "strongly opposed to saving the team" for the basketball editorial, and from "strongly favor cutting aid to Russia" to "strongly opposed cutting aid to Russia" for the Ames spy editorial.

Importance of subject. Also prior to reading the editorials, respondents rated the importance of the two topics on 4-point scales which ranged from "extremely important to me" to "not at all important to me."

Other measures. Respondents were also asked to evaluate each editorial on how interesting it was, how strong an argument it made, how clear was it, and how much of the editorial would they have read if they saw it in the newspaper. These items were included in an attempt to detract from the main purpose of the study, the estimated effect on oneself and others.

Results

Opinion and issue importance

Prior to reading the editorial, 88% of respondents reported favoring saving the team to some degree, which only 12% opposed saving the team. Regarding the spy topic, 52.4% favored cutting aid to Russia, while 47.6% opposed it. Clearly these two issues different dramatically in distribution of opinion about the topic. The two also differed by reported issue importance by respondents. Only 7.1% reported the basketball team issue was extremely important to them, while 16.7 % said the issue was moderately important, 29.5% reported the issue was somewhat important, and 45.2% said the issue was not at all important to them. With regard to the spy issue, 14.3% reported it was an extremely important issue, 36.9% reported the issue was moderately important, 36.9% reported the issue was somewhat important to them, and 11.9% reported the issue was not at all important to them.

Effect on self

A large proportion reported no change in opinion on the basketball team after reading the editorial. The large proportion of support for the team which was reported prior to reading the editorial may have resulted in little opportunity for perceived change, as the editorial favored change. Regarding the spy editorial, fewer reported no change in opinion, while more than half reported some degree of opposing cutting aid to Russia, the direction advocated in the editorial.

Table 1 about here

Effect on others versus effect on self

Paired sample t-tests were conducted to compare the "effect on self" scores with "effect on others" scores. Few significant differences in effect on self and effect on others were found; support for the third person effect was found only in the "individuated others" condition for both editorials.

Table 2 about here

The original opinions respondents had of the two issues, and the reported importance of the issues to the respondent may identify differences in the relationship between effect on self and effect on others, and the low support for the third person effect.

Prior opinion on topic

Regarding original opinion positions, there was a significant difference in reported effect on self between those who originally favored saving the team and those who opposed saving the team to some degree. Mean "effect on self" scores for those favoring saving the team was 3.66, while the mean for those opposing saving the team was 4.63 (t=2.04, p=.045). Respondents were then split according to their original position on the issue (favor saving the team vs. oppose saving the team), and difference scores (difference between effect on self and effect on each "other") were then compared. No significant differences were found. Due to the majority of respondents favoring saving the team, few subjects opposed saving the team. Small sample sizes for each condition may have also contributed to the lack of adequate comparisons.

For opinions on the spy issue, the difference between effect on self for those who favored cutting aid and those who opposed cutting aid was not statistically significant. Mean "effect on self" scores for those favoring cutting aid was 4.18, while the mean for those opposed to cutting aid was 4.81 ($t = -1.76$, $p = .083$). Respondents were again split into two groups (favor cutting aid vs. oppose cutting aid) and difference scores were compared. While no comparisons were significant for the general others and categorical others conditions, there was some differentiation in the individuated others condition. While one comparison was significant at the $p \leq .01$ level, the two other comparison in the individuated others condition approached significance.

Table 3 about here

Issue importance

In considering how different levels of issue importance might influence the relationship between the estimated effect on self and estimated effect on others, importance was also collapsed into a dichotomous variable of "high importance" and "low importance". With regard to the basketball team, nearly 75% saw the issue of low importance, while approximately 25% reported it to be a highly important issue. With regard to effect of message on oneself, issue importance appears to be influential. Mean "effect on self" scores for those reporting the issue to be highly important was 2.88, while the mean for those reporting the issue was not important was 4.07 (t=-3.48, p=.001). When considering the difference scores between effect on self and effect on others, small sample sizes, in this case those for whom the issue was important, was again problematic in achieving significance. Significant differences were found only in the general others condition, although the balance of the two groups in terms of sample size was more disproportionate in the categorical others and individuated others conditions.

In the spy issue, there was a greater balance of issue importance; when collapsed into high or low importance, 51.2% reported the issue was highly important, while 48.8% said the issue was of low importance. With regard to effect of the message on oneself, issue importance did not produce significant differences. Mean "effect on self" scores for those reporting the issue be highly important was 4.24, while the mean for those reporting the issue was not important was 4.77 (t=-1.47, p=.15).

When evaluating difference scores for the two groups, few significant differences were found, although in a couple cases issue importance did make a difference. For this issue, however, there was no consistency in the significant differences all occurring in the same condition as was the case in the basketball team topic, and in both topics regarding position on the issue.

Table 4 about here

Conclusions

There was overall weak support for the third-person effect hypothesis in this exploratory study, although some results are of interest. When considering which type of "other" brought about the third-person effect, it is interesting to note that it was most likely in the individuated others condition versus the general others or categorical others. One explanation if these findings are confirmed is that when "other" are individuated by great detail, people see less similarity between themselves and these others, they realize they are not familiar with these other people, and that they do not identify with them. Possibly by individuating others respondents see themselves as very different to these other people and therefore are more likely to estimate the effect of the media upon themselves and these individuated others differently. It could be the case that when others are broadly defined groups, while one is not familiar with the individuals who compose that group, they may be more likely to see themselves as more similar and be more familiar with those in a less well defined group, because it is then up to the respondent's interpretation to define who might compose that group.

These results do support further analysis of issue importance and original opinion position (and its congruity with the message) when evaluating the third-person effect. While few significant differences were found in this study, the topic of the message manipulation and respondent involvement with that topic may both be influential in the process of estimating the effect of mass media upon others. This study confirms the value of studying the variables further.

Limitations in this study may contribute to the lack of support for the third-person effect hypothesis. The small sample size for each condition was problematic, as was the design of considering the between subject results (in the 3 conditions) versus evaluating within subject results (which would have required all respondents to evaluate all possible "others"). Such a design may be more successful in determining how "others" are evaluated differently by the same respondent. While it was expected that the important of the two issues would differ, as would the degree of position taken on it, a lack of variability was also problematic. As most student support saving the basketball team prior to reading the editorial, there may be little opportunity for opinion change when so many respondents felt quite strongly about their opinion already.

This study does suggest particular considerations for future research. To adequately test which form of "other" is most likely to produce a third-person effect, or the greatest differentiation between effect on self and effect on other, comparison should be made in a within-subject design in which they estimate the effect of the media on various "others", some who may be individuated and others who are more general person or groups.

Another important factor which may provide insight into the process by which people estimate the effect of the media differently is to probe why respondents estimate the effect as they do. It could be valuable to find out that respondents most often consider particular characteristics when asked to make such estimates, such as "how similar is this person to me?", "how important might this issue be to them compared to how important it is to me?".

It would also be interesting in testing individuated others to use real other people whom respondents know personally. Real others would provide a greater familiarity for respondents. It might also be valuable to replicate an existing study which successfully found support for the third-person effect, and test the same process using those others defined by the original research and testing potential others, whether they be categorical others, individuated fictional others, or individuated real others.

Table 1
Reported effect on self

	Spy Editorial	Basketball Editorial
No change in my opinion	17.7%	55.8%
More in favor of saving team	27.8%	26.0%
More opposed to saving team	54.4%	18.2%

Table 2
Paired comparisons of effect scores

	Basketball Editorial		Spy Editorial	
General others (N=26)				
	Mean(a)	t-value	Mean	t-value
Effect on self	3.92		4.68	
Effect on:				
students	3.84	.26	4.80	.51
residents	3.92	.37	4.60	.13
others	4.08	.84	4.68	.14
Categorical others (N=22)				
	Mean	t-value	Mean	t-value
Effect on self	3.64		4.40	
Effect on:				
student	3.36	1.30	4.35	.12
housewife	3.82	.64	4.30	.35
bus. exec.	3.59	.12	4.40	.00
Individuated others (N=28)				
	Mean	t-value	Mean	t-value
Effect on self	3.96		4.60	
Effect on:				
Jeffrey	3.33	2.35*	4.83	.74
Cynthia	4.59	2.35*	4.72	.20
Joseph	4.26	1.28	3.03	3.73*

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

(a) Note: Effect scales were 7-point scales, anchored by "more in favor of saving team" at 1 and "more opposed to saving team" at 7; and "more in favor of punishing Russia" at 1 and "more opposed to punishing Russia" at 7.

Table 3
Analysis of Opinion Position by Difference scores (self-other)

	Basketball Editorial			**Spy Editorial**		
	Favor save	**Oppose save**	**T-value**	**Favor cut**	**Oppose cut**	**T-value**
General others						
Self-students	-.14	-.50	.32	-.50	.08	.90
Self-residents	-.19	.00	.18	-.17	.17	.53
Self-others	-.29	-.50	.20	-.17	.00	.28
Categorical others						
Self-student	.30	.00	.40	.38	-.17	.64
Self-housewife	-.15	-.50	.35	.13	.08	.07
Self-bus. exec.	.25	-2.0	1.73*	.50	-.33	.96
Individuated others						
Self-Jeffrey	.52	.75	.29	-.89	.73	2.66***
Self-Cynthia	-.70	.75	1.93*	-.59	.64	1.77*
Self-Joseph	-.35	.50	1.30	.89	2.45	1.86*

* $p \leq .10$ ** $p \leq .05$ *** $p \leq .01$

Table 4
Analysis of Issue importance by Difference scores (self-other)

	Basketball Editorial			**Spy Editorial**		
	High Imp.	**Low Imp.**	**T-value**	**High Imp.**	**Low Imp.**	**T-value**
General others						
Self-students	-1.29	.47	2.22*	.00	-.38	.58
Self-residents	-1.00	.42	2.08**	-.09	.08	.27
Self-others	-1.14	.29	2.11**	-.09	-.07	.02
Categorical others						
Self-student	.01	.33	-.60	-.80	.90	-2.32**
Self-housewife	-.50	.11	-.52	-.20	.40	-1.04
Self-bus. exec.	.00	.06	.05	-.20	.20	-.46
Individuated others						
Self-Jeffrey	-.17	.76	-1.44	-.56	.08	-1.04
Self-Cynthia	-1.17	-.29	-1.33	-.63	.58	1.96*
Self-Joseph	-.83	-.05	-1.42	1.75	1.15	.69

* $p \leq .10$ ** $p \leq .05$ *** $p \leq .01$

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"OMIGODITSTHEBIGONE!": USES OF AN ELECTRONIC BULLETIN BOARD (EBB) FOLLOWING THE GREAT QUAKE OF 1994

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Running Head: OMIGODITSTHEBIGONE!

"OMIGODITSTHEBIGONE": Uses of an Electronic Bulletin Board (EBB) Following the Great Quake of 1994

Abstract

A uses and gratifications approach was used in examining computer-based communication following a massive California earthquake. Content analyses of messages posted to the board showed a significant change in usage patterns during a three-day period, with more utilitarian messages the day of the earthquake and more social, emotion-laden messages one and two days afterward. Implications for the study of electronic bulletin boards are discussed.

Running Head: OMIGODITSTHEBIGONE!

"'OMIGODITSTHEBIGONE': USES OF AN ELECTRONIC BULLETIN BOARD (EBB) FOLLOWING THE GREAT QUAKE OF 1994

INTRODUCTION

On January 17, 1994, a forceful earthquake registering 6.6 on the Richter scale hit Southern California at 4:31 a.m. Pacific Standard Time. As media around the world began reporting the many stories surrounding the "Great Quake of '94," people tuned in to known television and radio news sources to see and hear updates. But widespread quake damage made it impossible for the news media to tell the whole story. People were often looking for additional personal information which the media could not provide. Many people turned to other modes of communication to try to find answers to their questions and concerns. Some went to the phones to call friends and family but found that many of the incoming and outgoing lines were blocked. Still others, both in the state of California and outside, turned to computer networks, many of which worked despite blocked phone lines.

About four hours after the earthquake occurred, the first message was posted to the USENET bulletin board, "alt.current-events.la-quake," by a user in Germany asking for details about the quake. By 1:30 p.m. PST, 50 messages had been posted to the bulletin board, and by 7:30 p.m., 246 messages had been posted. A little more than 48 hours after the board was established, just over 700 messages had been posted. To give some perspective on the volume of messages typically posted to USENET bulletin boards, a popular folk music board receives an average of 20-40 new postings a day while a less popular board about the southwestern U.S. might have 40 new postings a week.

The USENET quake bulletin board was just one of many meeting places on the electronic highway. According to an article in the Toronto Star:

> The Santa Monica Freeway might have been wrecked but the information highway was reaching for glory. The buzz about television being the 'electronic hearth' in times of crisis may be aging. The techno-scenti last week were overwhelmingly reaching out to their electronic community. Many of them wanted news absolutely crucial to them and not available from CNN: How is Aunt Ethel? Starting the moment the quake hit Monday, people used their computers and modems to find out how friends and relatives had fared in the quake, to tell their stories and to hear those of others. The global village became a global hive, buzzing with electronic mail, chat and news updates. (Schwartz & Thompson, p. E8)

This study examines the different ways people actively used USENET's alt.current-events.la-quake bulletin board immediately after the earthquake hit Southern California. We sought to examine a number of general questions, such as: Did the users turn to the USENET to give and receive specific information, or did people merely want to chat? Did Californians use the bulletin board differently from those outside of the state? Did more males than females use the board? Did uses change over the first several days of the board's existence? This exploratory study sought to answer these basic questions about use of a computer-mediated communication (CMC) following a natural disaster.

The Nature of Electronic Bulletin Boards

Computer communication networks have functions such as electronic mail, computer conferencing, and bulletin boards which connect people throughout the world. Electronic mail is typically one-to-one communication, while computer conferencing and bulletin boards involve group communication. The networks reach millions of people worldwide and include Internet, BITNET, and USENET among others (Harasim, 1993a).

The USENET -- the User's Network -- has a series of electronic bulletin boards (EBBs) formed around topics ranging from music to sports to sex; USENET included the alt.current-events.la-quake group (referred to hereafter as the quake group). An EBB typically has a moderator or systems operator who administers the group (Harasim, 1993b). Some systems operators screen the messages to ensure that they are appropriate to the board and/or particular threads of discussion before posting them to the EBB (Rafaeli, 1986). Others administer the group but allow all messages to appear; such is the case with the quake group. The implication is that researchers can see messages on this board in the form they were written without editing or filtering. This gives the view of what board subscribers, rather than the systems operator, considered important at any given point in time.

Communication on a bulletin board is asynchronous; the sender and the receiver do not have to be available at the same time to communicate with each other (Harasim, 1993b). A USENET bulletin board functions as follows: once a board is established, the availability of that new EBB may be announced along with other new boards when the computer user signs on to the bulletin board function. The user may also check the directory to see if EBBs on specific categories exist. If a user checked for the keyword "quake," this quake group would be listed. The user may then subscribe to the EBB, and as a subscriber, she or he may begin reading the posted messages (referred to on USENET as articles). The subscriber is told how many articles this group contains and how many are available at this particular time. As more articles are posted to a board, the moderator begins to limit user access to the newest articles only. The number of articles available at any one time varies by bulletin board. Moderators allow anywhere from one to more than 100 depending on the nature and the activity level of the group.

Bulletin board participants may initiate or cancel a subscription within minutes, and subscribers may belong to a number of bulletin boards. Some subscribers read them regularly while others may only check them sporadically. While network use is distinguished from broadcast media use because it is interactive (Harasim, 1993b), participants in newsgroups still can be differentiated by the degree to which they actively participate. Passive participants subscribe and read the articles but do not post articles -- they do not ask questions or make comments to the group. Active participants join in discussions, ask questions or make comments by posting articles from time to time. According to Harasim (1993b):

> Anyone can join, and participants can read or participate to the degree that they wish so long as they observe the social conventions and stay on topic. There are no formal expectations regarding quality, quantity, or timing of participation. (p. 30)

A Uses and Gratifications Approach to a Telelogic Medium

Rafaeli (1986) classifies bulletin boards as broadcast systems because articles are posted to reach wide audiences. As EBB usage increases, it fits more into the description of a mass medium. EBBs combine the "technological innovations of computer networking with the twin interests in communication: interpersonal conversation and mass propagation of messages" (Rafaeli, 1986, p. 123). Ball-Rokeach and Reardon (1988) agree with Rafaeli when they suggest that bulletin boards along with other new technologies are not a new social form of human communication but rather are an extension of interpersonal and mass communication.

Ball-Rokeach and Reardon (1988) divide forms of human communication into three basic areas: monologic communication, which includes mass communication and public speaking; dialogic communication, or interpersonal communication; and telelogic communication, which "involves dialogue among people at a distance via electronics" (p. 137). Telelogic communication is not limited generally by geographic location of the participants, and it occurs asynchronously. Ball-Rokeach and Reardon (1988) say that telelogic communication is "likely to provide new ways of organizing personal, group, and social life" (p. 138). A computer bulletin board is a form of telelogic communication which may have a few or millions of participants who share a common interest.

Rafaeli (1986) called for researchers to adopt the uses and gratifications approach to study computer-mediated communication. He cited the uses and gratifications paradigm as the theoretical framework which was instrumental in doing away with the former research approach that saw audiences as passive in mass-mediated contexts. Uses and gratifications focuses on individuals' media consumption rather than what effects the mass media have on people (Rubin, 1986). Rafaeli (1986) said that the "theoretical approach mandated by the uses and gratifications paradigm is toward a study of motivations of users mapped upon an empirical assessment of actual use" (p. 127).

Rubin (1986) identified three basic tenets of uses and gratifications research. First, individuals select specific communication vehicles or media to meet their needs. Second, media use is behavior which is motivated by different things in different people. And third, "people, not the media, are most influential in the relationship" (p. 281).

Rafaeli (1986) found that computer bulletin board users reported that their messages were primarily utilitarian (factual or purely informative in nature) although the messages on the bulletin board he examined were more nonutilitarian. He concluded that the data point to the coexistence of several motivations for use.

Ogan (1993) conducted an analysis of a computer bulletin board (as a telelogic medium) which focused on the Gulf War; the analysis covered that one-month period of the war in early 1991. Ogan found that messages during the first week of the war contained the most news of any week during the month. As days passed, opinions were increasingly mixed in with the news and soon there were more opinions and fewer news reports. People also discussed personal experiences, told jokes, and began expressing political opinions. By the end of the war, there were more non-war topics than war topics. By Rafaeli's (1986) description the news reports would be classified as utilitarian while the opinions, experiences and jokes would be nonutilitarian. The Ogan (1993) results suggest a dynamic nature to the content of a given EBB, and Ogan concluded that the EBB qualifies as a telelogic medium. We likewise expected to find the content of the quake board changing as the crisis nature of the situation abated and other information sources became available.

The current study examines articles in the alt.current-events.la-quake bulletin board to determine the different types of articles posted by active users in the first three days of the bulletin board's existence. While user gratification cannot be determined by examining message content, it is possible to extrapolate the purposes for which the board was used by conducting a content analysis.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a content analysis as the method of examining the first 1,000 articles posted to one computer bulletin board, alt.current-events.la-quake, during its first three days in existence. Kassarjian (1977) notes the distinguishing characteristics of content analysis: it must be objective, systematic, and quantitative. The requirement of objectivity minimizes the effect of personal biases and selective perceptions; content analysis is thus differentiated from literary criticism, which may be insightful but is neither replicable nor reliable. Systematization refers to the use of categories and the coding of content according to consistently applied rules (Wimmer & Dominick, 1991). Finally, quantifying the results allows precision, interpretation, and inference.

Holsti (1969) identified the three general classes of research that are particularly well suited to content analysis: (1) when the researcher's data is limited to documentary evidence; (2) when a subject's own language and means of expression are crucial to understanding a phenomenon; and (3) when multiple investigators are needed to objectively examine a large volume of material. The present study met these criteria. For instance, while a follow-up sample of network users would be possible (in which we could ask respondents what they were feeling or communicating during the crisis period following the earthquake), such research would not be reliable. Retrospective accounts are subject to inaccuracy and bias (Aronson et al, 1990) and, more importantly, would not include the rich contextual pattern of communication that existed "in the heat of the moment." In the present study, a content-analytic approach was used in order to capture subjects' language, means of expression, and communication themes as they occurred in a computer-mediated environment in the aftermath of a crisis.

The Sample

For this study, the sample included 285 articles posted to the alt.current-events.la-quake newsgroup. A systematic sample with a random start was taken from the first 1,000 articles posted to the newsgroup. A random number table was used to identify the first article in the analysis, and every third article was selected after that for inclusion. This method allowed for an even distribution of articles from throughout the sampling frame.

The researchers copied the first 1,000 articles from the newsgroup onto a computer disk. At about five points during the copying, the system would not copy an article. When the researcher came across a missing article (each article is numbered consecutively) and if that article would have been selected for the sample, the researcher moved on to the next number for inclusion. If that missing number would not have been included in the sample, the researcher counted it as if it were present and chose the next number according to the selection process. Also, because the newsgroup was set up so readers were eventually limited to accessing only the latest articles, there were two points in the first 500 articles where 60 articles were missed in the copy sessions. Since every third article was included in the sample, this means that 40 articles are missing from this sample of the first 1,000 articles. While having the complete group of 1,000 articles to sample from would have been preferable for study, it was not believed that the omission of 40 articles from the sample would bias the results.

The Content Analysis

The unit of analysis was the computer newsgroup, specifically "alt.current-events.la-quake." The unit of observation was the article. The categories of analysis were: date, capacity of sender (unofficial or official message), gender, origin of message (independently posted article or response to another article), location of sender (in California or outside), and emotional content (if article contained fear or anxiety, humor, anger, sarcasm, or other emotion). Articles were also coded by their primary and secondary purpose. Several low-incidence purposes were collapsed with other similar ones – the final purpose categories included specific request; "Good Samaritan"; condition or area update; comment on earthquakes; comment on computers/email/phone lines; comment on the future/taxpayer funding/mass transit; institutional releases; and other. (See the Appendix for a complete description of these categories.)

By looking at articles from the first three days of the bulletin board's existence, the researchers were able to examine different types of usage immediately following a natural disaster.

The Pre-test

A content analysis was performed on 60 articles by both researchers to ensure that the categories were both appropriate and exhaustive. Non-sampled articles from the first 1,225 articles in the newsgroup were used. The researchers were thus able to more clearly define the categories and to agree upon measuring techniques.

Intercoder Reliability

Each researcher coded approximately half of the sample articles. Sixty articles (just over 20 percent) were coded by both researchers so that intercoder reliability could be checked. The intercoder reliability, calculated using Holsti's method described in Wimmer and Dominick (1991), was 91 percent.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

This section reports the findings of this study. It includes a description of the sample and the results of statistical tests of the research questions of interest.

Results

Summary findings. Two hundred eighty-five messages were coded according to the categories mentioned earlier. Almost all of the messages were from unofficial sources (97.5%), with the remainder from official sources such as government agencies. The messages were predominantly from males (69.8%), with 16.5% from females; the remainder not determinable or applicable. The dominance of the board by men is consistent with findings reported by Ogan (1993) from electronic bulletin board messages in other domains. Further, reflecting the continuous nature of communication on the board, most messages were in direct response to previously posted messages (211 articles or 74%); only about one-fourth of the messages were original--that is, they were not posted by the author in response to some other message. A majority of the messages originated in California (56.1%), while 39.3% originated from other parts of the U.S. and 4.6% came from outside the U. S.

The messages were spread out rather evenly by date sent. One-third of the messages (95, or 33.3%) were sent on January 17, the day of the earthquake, while 113 messages (39.6%) were sent on the day following the quake, January 18. The remaining 27% of the messages coded in this study were sent on January 19, the second day following the earthquake.

The messages represented a broad range of purposes, though most messages were concentrated in a few of the eight primary message purposes. There were 69 comments (24.2%) on conditions or area updates, 55 comments (19.3%) on earthquakes, and 48 comments (16.8%) about the future/funding/mass transit. (See Table One.)

Table One: Messages by Primary Purpose

	frequency	pct.
condition, area update	69	24.2 %
comment on quake	55	19.3
future/funding/ transit	48	16.8
computers/e-mail/phones	31	10.9
specific request	23	8.1
"Good Samaritan"	13	4.6
institutional	9	3.2
other	37	13.0

By Rafaeli's (1986) distinction, these purposes may be differentiated as utilitarian or nonutilitarian. Utilitarian uses -- those which are factual or informative in nature -- made up 114 or 40% of the messages while 60% or 171 were nonutilitarian. Utilitarian messages included those in the following categories: condition, area update; specific request; Good Samaritan; and institutional. All others were considered nonutilitarian; that is, they were opinion-oriented or social-oriented (people were expressing opinions or chatting, not trying to give or receive specific factual information).

Of the 285 messages, 57 (20.0%) had clear emotional content; almost half of those (28) reflected sarcasm as the dominant theme. The remaining 29 emotion-laden messages were marked by anger (17 messages), humor (9), and fear or anxiety (3).

Among the interesting themes in these messages was the occasional use of the bulletin board to comment on issues only vaguely related to the earthquake--these were messages initially coded as "soapbox." Only eight messages fell into this category, though they made for interesting conversation:

> "...the point is that people in other countries are rather bemused by the way Americans always seem to want to set up mutual 12-step support groups to help themselves get over traumas..." (male, Jan. 18)
>
> "You might also read McColloch v. Maryland, (US 1819) and Helvering and Steward (US 1937). Even US v. Butler (US 1936). which held the (subsequently overruled) position that Congress may not REGULATE for the general welfare, held that Congress can TAX and SPEND for the general welfare" (male, Jan. 19)

Due to the low number of soapbox messages, these were placed into the "other" category. In these cases, it appeared the use of the board came in fulfilling someone's need to be heard on some issue considered centrally important (regardless of the forum best suited to do so).

Several board users commented on the board itself and its perceived superiority to other forms of communication at the time:

> "I've just returned from a Galileo Project meeting, and am flabbergasted at the amount of good up to date info that is already posted here." (male, Jan. 17)
>
> "As an evacuee of the Laguna Beach brush fires I can tell you not to put too much stock in what the news media says even if they all say it as they seem to listen to each other..." (female, Jan.17)

This environment also provided a glimpse into some very human, real-time reactions:

> "...Sherman Oaks is on the southern edge, just east of center. [Damn! There goes another aftershock.]..." (male, Jan. 18, condition/area update)
>
> "My wife yelled out OMIGODITSTHEBIGONE! As is (sic) happened..I said Nahhhhh.. Just a little one... She said HOWDOYOUKNOW!..." (male, Jan. 18)

Perhaps the most interesting insights into this communication environment, though, come from a series of cross-tabulations, as discussed below.

Specific comparisons. As might be expected, a significant difference ($p<.0001$) was found in the primary purposes of messages according to the date they were sent. Both specific request and update on condition articles dropped dramatically in frequency after the day of the quake. Conversely, the comments on funding and rebuilding issues increased substantially by the day after the quake. Table Two illustrates this relationship:

Table Two: Messages by Primary Purpose and Date Sent

	specific request	Good Samaritan	conditions, areas	quake comment	computers/ email etc.	funding, future	instit.	other
Jan 17	12	2	37	17	14	5	1	7
Jan 18	8	9	21	24	12	21	1	17
Jan 19	3	2	11	14	5	22	7	13

($\chi^2_{14} = 54.6, p<.0001$)

In the period immediately following the earthquake, a greater percentage of messages concerned descriptions of the destruction (or lack thereof) in certain areas of California, along with requests to help find particular people and relay messages:

> "I live out in the San Gabrial Valley and we have had no power outages at my home or work, and most of the major damage is in the San Fernando Valley with some in the Hollywood area" (male, Jan. 17, condition/area update)
>
> "I've got some relatives in Anaheim and Orange and can't get through to them by phone (no surprise) and just wanted to make sure nothing major had happened in that neck of the woods" (male, Jan. 17, specific request)

> "Help my family is living in Chatsworth and I am unable to reach them. If somone [sic] in the area could please call them and see if the are OK. My name is. . . ASK for . . . at (818). . ." (male, Jan. 17, specific request)

As time progressed, information became more readily available, and alternative sources of communication were re-opened. The dominant themes on the board changed. Board users increasingly commented on this earthquake (especially how it compared to other earthquakes) and discussed "off-the-wall" earthquake theories such as possible relationships between earthquakes and weather or animal behavior. Users also began to address the future, consider mass transit systems, and speak to issues of the wallet:

> "I am against using federal [sic] to cover damages that would have been covered if the residents would have bought insurance." (male, Jan. 18)
>
> " just thinking about the theory of 'earthquake weather', how do you explain the big earth quake in Alaska, back years ago it was an 8+ if I recall right. They weren't in the middle of any big heat wave. . ." (male, Jan. 18)
>
> "Actually I noticed birds behaving strangely on Sunday also. In all 3 cases it was trees covered with small bird [sic] chirping wildly. . . But I didn't associate it with the earthquake until afterwards." (female, Jan. 19)

Utilitarian or nonutilitarian message posting by date was significant ($p<.001$). Messages posted on the day of the quake were more utilitarian (52 of 95, or 55%), while 74 of the 113 messages (66%) posted on the second day were nonutilitarian, and 54

(70%) of the 77 messages on the third day were nonutilitarian. This shows a clear trend toward nonutilitarian messages as the immediate crisis subsided.

Significant differences were also found (p<.03) in the origin of messages according to the date they were sent. There were many more responses than original messages each day, but the pattern became more pronounced after the first day. (See Table Three.)

Table Three: Messages by Origin and Date Sent

	original message	response
January 17	34	61
January 18	22	91
January 19	18	59

($\chi^2_2 = 7.52, p<.03$)

A difference in the location from which a message was sent, according to the date sent, neared statistical significance (p<.06), as shown in Table Four. A higher proportion of messages came from outside California on the second day than on the first and third days.

Table Four: Messages by Location and Date Sent

	California	non-Calif.
January 17	58	24
January 18	55	43
January 19	47	19

($\chi^2_2 = 5.70, p<.06$)

The purposes of the messages differed significantly by location (p<.001). Californians dominated each of the categories except for the specific request category (5 Californians versus 14 non-Californians). In the computer/email/phone category, Californians posted 13 messages and 14 non-Californians posted messages. (See Table Five.)

Table Five: Messages by Primary Purpose and Location

	specific request	Good Samaritan	conditions, areas	quake comment	computers/ email etc.	funding, future	instit.	other
Calif.	5	9	51	32	13	27	8	15
non-Calif.	14	4	10	16	14	14	1	13

(χ^2, = 29.2, p<.001)

When comparing utilitarian to nonutilitarian messages by location of sender, differences neared statistical significance (p<.07). While Californians posted more messages in both categories, the proportion from Californian to non-Californian was higher in the utilitarian message category. (See Table Six.)

Table Six: Messages by Utilitarianism and Location

	Utilitarian	Nonutilitarian
Calif.	73	29
non-Calif.	87	57

(χ^2_1 = 3.3, p<.07)

The purposes of the messages differed significantly (p<.0001) according to gender. Differences were strongest in the quake comment and future/funding categories. (See Table Seven.) When purposes were collapsed into the utilitarian and nonutilitarian categories, the differences were no longer significant. Males had 74 utilitarian and 125 nonutilitarian messages while females had 25 utilitarian and 22 nonutilitarian messages.

Table Seven: Messages by Primary Purpose and Gender

	specific request	Good Samaritan	conditions, areas	quake comment	computers/ email etc.	funding, future	instit.	other
males	14	8	52	48	20	38	0	24
females	7	4	13	7	5	3	1	7
NA/unkn.	2	1	4	5	6	7	8	6

($\chi^2_{14} = 59.6, p<.0001$)

The emotional content of the messages was significantly related to the purpose of the messages. (See Table Eight.) The relative scarcity of emotional content within most categories did not hold true for messages dealing with funding and future efforts to rebuild. Half of the messages in this category reflected emotional content. A debate raged among several users about whether Californians knowingly assume a greater risk of disaster by living where they do and, if so, whether federal tax dollars should "bail out" Californians displaced by the quake:

> "...consider that California is home to 10% of the US population and contributes more than its share to the GDP and federal coffers, a federal bailout of a billion or two is small potatoes. Save your pathetic anti-California diatribe for another day." (male, Jan. 17, anger)
>
> "It is a lot easier to have 'empathy' with people when your pocket is not being picked to 'help' them." (male, Jan. 18, sarcasm)

Table Eight: Messages by Primary Purpose and Emotional Content

	specific request	Good Samaritan	conditions, areas	quake comment	computers/ email etc.	funding, future	instit.	other
emotion	1	0	2	10	5	24	0	15
none	22	13	67	45	26	24	9	22

($\chi^2_7 = 58.8, p<.0001$)

When looking at purposes as utilitarian or nonutilitarian by emotional content, a similar significant pattern emerges (p<.0001). Nonutilitarian or opinion-based messages had a higher degree of emotional content than the utilitarian messages. (See Table Nine.)

Table Nine: Messages by Utilitarianism and Emotional Content

	Emotion	No Emotion
Utilitarian	3	*111*
non-Utilitarian	*54*	*117*

($\chi^2_1 = 35.8, p<.0001$)

No differences existed in emotional content by gender, though within the emotion category all 28 instances of sarcasm came from males. Sarcasm was a dominant emotional theme in the discussion of financial issues and government assistance.

Discussion

The uses and gratifications approach proved to be an illuminating way of examining electronic bulletin board use immediately following a crisis situation. Results showed that, in a period of stress, uncertainty, and limited access to information, the board served important individual purposes. Moreover, those purposes changed dramatically over a short time period.

During the immediate crisis (the day the quake occurred), board use was very utilitarian with little emotional content. Users were requesting and receiving factual information about conditions and people. There was little social use of the board; that is, few people were giving opinions. Messages were generally short and to the point.

Later, the crisis subsided and other communication sources, including the news media, could offer better information. The phone companies were blocking fewer lines so people had more opportunities to contact friends and family. At this point in time, the character of this board changed. Messages were longer, were primarily nonutilitarian, and more often contained emotion. In her 1993 study, Ogan found that uses changed over time from utilitarian to nonutilitarian. She also found, as did this study, that males dominated the discussion over all time periods.

Our results were also supportive of Rubin's (1986) three basic tenets of uses and gratifications. First, people selected specific modes of communication, in this case the EBB, to meet specific needs. In support of the second tenet, different people had different needs; this was reflected in their uses of the board for different purposes, and that their purposes changed over time and by location of sender. And, certainly people were most influential in this dynamic rather than the board itself, due to the interactive nature of the board.

This study contributes to the literature on computer-mediated communications in two primary ways. It supports the call from prior research to examine the use of CMC within the uses and gratifications framework, and it demonstrates usage patterns following a crisis situation. Of course, this is just a single study of only one EBB after one crisis. Many more studies must be performed on EBBs before the results may be generalized. Further, different kinds of EBBs should be examined, including those created for a specific event (or crisis) or a specific topic or as a forum for people to share thoughts about mutual interests hobbies, or other endeavors.

In sum, the alt.current-events.la-quake board seemed to function well as a loosely formed unit--requests for help were made and met, scientific data and theories were discussed by experts and apparent novices alike, and frustrations with the system (or with one another) were vented. Scarcely used by official sources, the board was the product of hundreds of individuals with hundreds of needs and desires, initially moved by the urgency of the moment.

One male user pointed out the added value of electronic bulletin board use in this situation when he wrote on January 17:

> "Come on and let's keep each other up to date here! Remember: this is the Electronic Superhighway, but not even a 6.6 earthquake can/could make it collapse!!"

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APPENDIX

Coding Categories for Content Analysis

1. **Date**

2. **Capacity of Sender** – Articles were coded by whether the sender was posting the article in an official capacity (such as from the California Governor's office or Department of Transportation) or in an unofficial capacity, that is, as an individual for her or his own purposes. Media requests were included in the unofficial capacity as they were not official news releases from a government agency or relief organization.

3. **Gender** – Articles were coded by whether the sender was male, female, or unknown/not applicable. For most individuals' articles, it was possible to determine whether that person was male or female by the name given or by blatant information in the text of the article. Those who could not be identified by sex (i.e. those with gender neutral names such as Pat or Terry, those with unidentifiable foreign names, or those who gave no names) were coded as unknown/not applicable. Those articles from the media and official organizations were coded in the unknown/not applicable category also.

4. **Origin of Message** – Articles were coded by whether each was an original article posted independently by the author, or whether the author responded specifically to another article which had previously been posted. In many of the response articles, the subject line of the article included "Re: [topic]." Also many of the response articles' text began with, "In article <[article identification code]>, [sender identification by name or username] writes:" which was a clear indication that the current article was a direct response to a previous article and that the author had used a "reply" option when posting the article. Still other authors merely stated in text such statements as "This message is for the guy who. . ." or "To the person who requested information on. . ."

5. **Location of Sender** – Articles were categorized by whether the sender was in the state of California or outside of California. Many were identifiable by usernames (such as "james@ucla. . .," addresses included in the message or in the signatures, or by content of the text (such as "I live in L.A. and. . ." Those locations which were not identifiable were coded as unknown.

6. **Primary/Secondary Purpose** -- Articles were coded by both primary and secondary purposes which was judged from the content. Initially, there were 17 categories. These were later collapsed into 8 categories because several purposes were similar. The final categories were:

- specific request to find or call someone or to get information about a specific area;
- "Good Samaritan" which included response to the request to find or call someone, or an offer to help;
- update on a specific area or specific comment on conditions such as road damage, building conditions, hospital evacuation;
- question or comment on earthquakes, earthquake theories, facts, details on this quake such as magnitude and number of aftershocks;
- question or comment on computers, email, or telephone system;
- question or comment on aspects of the future including reconstruction, mass transit ("Is L.A. ready for mass transit now?"), taxpayer funding, insurance, federal agency support, or costs of rebuilding;
- institutional articles including official releases of information (such as those from the Governor's office) and media requests for firsthand accounts;
- other comments such as general comments, soapbox comments, thank-yous.

7. **Emotional Content** -- Either no emotional content or some emotional content (including fear, anxiety, humor, anger, sarcasm, or other emotion).

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INFLUENCES ON REPORTERS' USE OF SOURCES AT HIGH CIRCULATION U.S. NEWSPAPERS

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INTRODUCTION

Insufficient evidence existed to charge Jonathan Jackson, son of Jesse Jackson, as a suspect in a drug probe in the early months of 1994. Nevertheless, The San Francisco Examiner, quoting a federal affidavit as its only source, reported the story. Other news organizations followed suit. However, no mention appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Chicago Tribune, or The Chicago Sun Times.[1] What influenced some newspapers to print a one-sided, one-source news story while others chose to ignore it altogether?

Normally, it is assumed that reporters are charged with gathering information representative of both sides of the story. Yet, research indicates that an imbalance of source usage exists in legal stories such as Jackson's, as well as other types of controversial news.[2] Despite the availability of numerous information sources, journalists' decisions to utilize them may be patterned by influences other than concerns for audience needs or adherence to professional norms. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify sources that are often used in news stories and to identify the key influences or reasons for using such sources. Reporters from high-circulation, U.S. newspapers were surveyed concerning influences from personal judgments, organizational constraints, and characteristics of the sources are explored.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Journalists' Personal Judgments

Reporters are given wide latitude when deciding how to cover news and must rely on their own judgments when selecting sources. In case studies and content analyses, a number of personal judgments have been identified as influences on news content.

Fico found that reporters' perceptions of themselves as journalists influenced the number and type of sources used. Reporters utilized sources differently depending on whether they perceived themselves as a watchdog of the government, a neutral observer, a translator, or a participant.[3]

The type of story covered also affects reporters' judgments about source usage. Berkowitz and Beach found that diversity of the source-mix increased for non-routine news. As journalists developed their own story ideas, they also sought various sources of information. For routine news, on the other hand, the news sources were usually provided by an editors.[4]

Rakow and Kranich found that gender bias may also influence source selection, with a media bias against using women as news sources.[5] Brown, et al. also reported women were under-represented in news stories. Of the sources who were identifiable by sex, barely 10% were women.[6]

Lichter and Rothman studied political orientations of reporters at prominent newspapers such as *The New York Times* and

The Washington Post and at three television networks. They found these journalists overwhelmingly liberal in their opinions and concluded that reporters viewed liberals as more credible sources than conservatives.[7] Furthermore, Stocking and LaMarca suggest that journalists fail to seek out and select sources which may refute their ideas. Interviews with eleven newspaper reporters led the authors to believe that reporters are subject to confirmation bias which influences the sources used.[8]

Influence of the News Organization

News may be determined to a large extent by organizational constraints rather than personal judgments of the reporters.[9] According to Berkowitz, the constraints from organizational needs subordinate any personal ideology.[10] For example, time requirements are often a reason for a lack of diversity in news sources. When deadlines are approaching, availability of the sources becomes important.[11]

Breed found that journalists adhered to newsroom policy to gain respect of superiors and fellow reporters.[12] Similarly, Judd observed that reporters tended to see their roles as filling a need for the city editor, rather than serving the public's need for information.[13]

Sigal found that newsgathering routines have resulted in a lack in diversity of sources.[14] In addition, Fico found that reporters used sources differently depending on the copy production pressures under which they worked. Newspaper reporters in Indiana and Michigan statehouse bureaus used more sources than other newspaper reporters, and newspaper reporters used more sources than wire service reporters, who faced the greatest copy production pressures.[15]

Salomone, et al. conducted a case study on the coverage of environmental risk stories and found that organizational constraints had a major impact on source usage. They found that editors and news producers may consider important information too technical or insufficiently interesting and controversial; therefore, it was eliminated in the competition for space and time.[16] Drew, observing three beat reporters, also determined that expectations from superiors strongly influenced the reporter's work.[17]

Peer-group pressure within news organizations may also influence reporters' source use. Grey, in his observations of a Supreme Court reporter, found that interaction among news reporters reinforces and confirms the ideas they are reporting.[18] Crouse also found reporters following one another on topic selection and even leads, due to pressure from superiors to conform to newsroom ideals.[19] Dunwoody, studying a scientific convention, also found an "innerclub" of reporters whose stories set the agenda for other reporters, in part because of their expertise in the scientific field.[20]

Qualities of News Sources

Particular qualities of sources may make interaction with reporters more or less attractive and useful for news organizations. In a case study of a city-hall beat, Gieber and

Johnson noted that reporters had essentially become spokespersons for the city. The reporters admitted that they found themselves writing for the sources, not their editors or their audience.[21] Soloski also found that reporters' believed their closeness with a source affected the way they wrote stories and their treatment of that source in stories.[22]

In a case study identifying explanation for heavy reliance on certain government sources, Fico found reasons most often given by reporters included accessibility of the source, the sources' ability to explain procedures and proposals, and the ability of sources to supply reliable information.[23]

Shoemaker and Mayfield summarize five possible reasons for what eventually becomes news: (1) content is shaped by journalists' orientations and background; (2) content results from social and institutional pressures both within and outside the news organization; (3) content is a function of newsgathering routines; (4) content is controlled by people who hold power in society, and the media are tools of the status quo; and (5) content reflects social reality with little distortion.[24]
This study will compare the influence of two such perspectives including journalists' personal judgments and media institutions' influence. In addition, the view that news content is determined by powerful social institutions is indirectly assessed by illuminating patterns in "official source" usage. Unlike previous research which has utilized a case-study or content analysis methodology, this survey attempts to obtain information

from a larger segment of print journalists.

Based on the literature that suggests organizational influences in a newsroom may overmatch individual biases or concerns of reporters, the following hypotheses will be tested.

H1: Organizational pressure, followed by personal judgments of reporters, will affect the use of news sources.

H2: Professional background will affect the use of news sources.

H3: Organizational pressure, personal judgments of reporters, and professional background of reporters will affect official source usage in controversial news stories.

METHOD

The population for the study was news reporters who covered controversial government, education, business or law enforcement stories. Reporters from the top 21 circulation newspapers listed in Editor and Publisher were chosen for analysis.

Names of journalists were obtained from bylines of newspaper articles subscribed for the week of April 21-26, 1986, for a previous study of reporting of local conflict. This sample assured that all journalists surveyed had been in their positions for at least six years when this follow-up study was conducted. This length of time would have permitted reporters to become well-established with sources.

Two-hundred-fifty-two questionnaires were distributed via mail survey during the summer of 1992. Two follow-up mailings were conducted. A total of 121 surveys were returned, representing a 48 percent response rate.

Both open-ended and closed-ended questions were included in the questionnaire. Closed-ended questions asked journalists to indicate on a five-point scale how often listed influences would affect their decision to use particular sources. Twenty items were listed as influences including source credibility, articulateness, and gender, as well as time pressure, fear of litigation, and organizational pressures from managers, peers, advertising executives, etc. Reporters were also provided a list of 24 sources and asked to indicate on a five-point scale how often such sources were used in their news stories. Sources included government officials, press releases, ordinary citizens, published materials, etc. The 24 sources and the 20 influences were derived from the literature and pretests with professionals.

In the open-ended questions, reporters were given three hypothetical conflict situations concerning business, education and crime. Reporters were asked to list possible sources for these stories and indicate on a five-point scale the likelihood of using such sources. Once questionnaires were returned, listed sources were coded as "official" or "unofficial." The average frequency of use based on the five-point scale was calculated for official sources and unofficial sources for each situation.

Official sources were defined as those speaking for individuals or organizations, while unofficial sources were defined as those speaking on their own.[25] Official sources included company or organizational spokespersons, government officials, official governmental reports, lawyers representing clients, and experts such as psychologists. Unofficial sources included individual business persons, employees of organizations, victims, and friends and relatives of victims.

To check for coder reliability, an initial training session was conducted where two coders identified responses as official sources or unofficial sources. After the initial training session, percentage of agreement on the coding of variables was 98.5 percent.

Missing data were handled by averaging scores from other respondents and replacing the missing data with an average score. For example if no information about the number of stories filed per week was provided, the number from other respondents at the same newspaper were averaged, and that mean score replaced the missing value. In the absence of information, the mean value is a best guess about a missing score on a variable.[26] No variable used in the data set was missing over five percent of its data.

From the list of 20 source influences, factor analysis was used to create three scales. One scale, tapping reporter judgments of sources, consisted of 5 variables: source articulateness, agreement with source position, source likability, prominence of the source and accessibility of the source. The scale alpha reliability was .72.

Another scale tapping organizational pressure, consisted of 3 variables: peer pressure, manager pressure and advertising department pressure. The scale alpha reliability was .70.

The third scale, tapping professional background consisted of 2 variables: years at the newspaper and years as a reporter.

The scale alpha reliability was .85.

The three scales accounted for 64.4 percent of the variance. Intercorrelations among these scales were very low with none exceeding .19. Following the factor analysis, each scale representing a source influence was correlated with the 24 items questioning the use of sources.

H1 was tested by comparing the correlations between personal judgments and sources used with the correlations between organizational influences and sources used. For H2, the correlations between professional background and sources used were compared. Comparisons were based on the number and size of positive and negative correlations.

To assess H3, the three scales were used in an analysis of three specific conflict situations where reporters identified on a five point scale their use of official or unofficial sources. The first situation involved an education story where the superintendent resigned following a discrimination against minorities charge. The second situation involved a crime concerning child molestation. The third situation involved business conflict concerning development of a rural community. The goal of this analysis was to determine if conflict in a story or a particular type of story changes the patterns found testing the first two hypotheses. All variables analyzed were interval level data.

RESULTS

Table 1 identifies the frequency distribution of several individual influences on source use identified by reporters. The three most influential and three least influential variables are presented. Of the 20 possible variables, more than 50 percent of the journalists responding indicated source credibility, source accessibility, and time constraints were often or always influential. When looking at variables journalists identify as least influential, more than 90 percent responded that gender of the source, pressure from the advertising department and policy of the newspaper about political issues were either seldomly or never influential.

To test the hypotheses, only those variables included in scales derived from factor analysis were used. H1 predicted that the use of sources would be affected primarily by organizational influences followed by personal judgments of reporters. This hypothesis was not supported. Of the sources assessed, Table 2 indicates reporter judgments of source qualities produced eight correlations exceeding 0.2 compared to five such correlations for news organization pressure. Interestingly, all correlations were negative among reporter judgments of source qualities and their use of sources. The most avoided sources of information included school officials (-.27), law enforcement events (-.39), and material released by non-government groups or organizations (-.29).

The organizational pressures felt by reporters, however, tended to produce positive correlations. Such pressures seem to most powerfully push reporters to use such sources as school officials (.20), business sources (.20), ordinary citizens (.21), marches (.23), and reference works (.29).

H2 looked at how professional background related to source usage. As Table 2 indicated, when looking at the correlations among professional background influences and sources used, the only relatively important correlations produced were with anonymous sources (-.21) and "other" (-.20).

H3 explored the influences of reporter judgments and organizational pressure on the use of official and unofficial sources in specific situations dealing with education, crime, and business. The conflict situations basically reinforced patterns illuminated by the previous correlations among the scales and the battery of routine sources. Table 3 indicates that, again, reporter judgments had the dominant effect. Specifically, the more reporters considered their own judgments of source qualities important, the less likely official sources were used (-.21, -.20). Interestingly, organizational pressures were negatively associated with frequency of use of law enforcement sources in such conflict situations (-.16).

DISCUSSION

This research explored the way in which sources are selected by reporters at high circulation U.S. newspapers. Overall, the results failed to support the view that organizational pressures dominate. Rather, news content was found to be most powerfully shaped by journalists' own orientations toward key source qualities. The personal judgments of journalists assessed in this study had the most powerful and numerous influences on the selection of sources in both routine and conflict situations. However, the notion that content is shaped by pressures within the newsroom also received support.

The explanation that news is controlled by people who hold power in society was also qualified by data from this study. Specifically, the official sources assessed in this study were avoided by reporters who indicated that credibility and other source qualities were especially influential. This suggests that as the influence of reporter judgments increased, the use of routine sources and official sources assessed in the questionnaire decreased. However, pressures from news organizations tended to push reporters toward some of these same sources, creating some balance in source usage decisions.

One explanation for the findings of this study is that the news reporters included in the study were all from large newspapers and, therefore, likely to have more control over the types of sources they used in stories. Second, the reporters were veterans with a minimum of six years on their news beats and with the news organizations for which they worked. Such experience may provide reporters with greater ability to develop alternate channels to the routine news sources assessed in this study. Furthermore, these experienced reporters are likely to have more power with their own managements.

Overall, the research indicated the importance of having reporters identify and describe sources they might use, as well the influences on such decisions. Although self reports can be limiting, linking such responses to the content data presented in the hypothetical situations was useful in assessing the reliability of the results. It was encouraging to note that reporters at our most prestigious newspapers suggest they are able to resist internal and external pressures which are so often spoken of at smaller newspapers or television stations. When looking at individual influences, the single largest influence was source credibility, and the least influential variable was pressure from the advertising department.

Additional research is needed to identify whether these patterns of source usage hold true at smaller newspapers and with reporters of varying professional experience. Less experienced reporters from organizations that have fewer resources most likely have very different considerations about selecting sources. These considerations are important to identify and address so that consumers and producers of the news media have a better understanding of the decisions surrounding the reporting of news stories in their communities, as well as the agenda-setting function of the press.

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Table 1. Frequency Distributions of Most and Least Influential Variables on Source Usage

Most influential

Influence	Percents Often influential	 Always influential
Credibility of the source	19.8	76.0
Accessibility of the source	46.3	15.7
Time pressure	43.8	6.6

Least influential

	Seldom influential	Never influential
Gender of the source	20.7	71.9
Pressure from advertising dept.	3.3	95.9
Newspaper's policy on political issues	16.5	76.0

N = 121

Table 2. Correlations between Influences and Sources Used.

	Reporter Judgments	News organization pressure	Professional background
Law enforcement officials	**-.22**	.10	.06
School officials	**-.27**	**.20**	.15
Business sources	-.06	**.20**	-.06
Citizens	-.05	**.21**	.04
Law enforcement events	**-.39**	-.13	.10
Marches	-.13	**.23**	.11
Reference works	**-.20**	**.29**	.19
Government matter	**-.24**	.00	.04
Private matter	**-.29**	-.03	-.01
Government public relations	**-.25**	.11	.04
Non-government public relations	**-.21**	.16	.10
Other sources	.04	.18	**-.20**
Anonymous sources	-.09	-.08	**-.21**

*Source highlighted if correlated at least .20 with one of the above influences

Table 3. Correlations Between Influences and Official Sources Used in Specific Conflict Situations.

	Reporter Judgments	Organizational Pressure	Professional Background
Educational Conflict	**-.21**	-.02	-.03
Law Enforcement Conflict	.02	**-.16**	-.06
Business Conflict	**-.20**	-.06	.01

*Source highlighted if correlated at least .20 with one of the above influences

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The Audience Objections Index: A Measure of TV Viewer Tolerance of Entertainment Gatekeeping

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Abstract

A telephone survey of 407 adults measured the level of audience agreement with a local ABC television affiliate's decision to preempt the broadcast of "NYPD Blue" in a rural market. The study applied the gatekeeping metaphor and created an Audience Objections Index to determine audience objection to specific program attributes and to measure individual levels of tolerance for local station gatekeeping decisions. A regression equation that explained 50 percent of variance indicated the reliability of the AOI.

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The Audience Objections Index:
A Measure of TV Viewer Tolerance of Entertainment Gatekeeping

As the range of channels available to the average television viewer has expanded during the last couple decades, the local affiliates of broadcast television networks have been forced to operate within a narrower market niche. Viewers now choose from among dozens of programming alternatives in addition to those offered by the previously dominant networks. Local stations therefore must tailor their offerings to better fit their specific market niche and may occasionally even turn away from network fed programming.

While television affiliates have always had the right to preempt network programs, these stations are making programming decisions amid a new dynamic in local control. In this new television environment, affiliates must be even more careful to select programming that appeals to the unique characteristics and tastes of their local market. Lack of perfect knowledge makes this gatekeeping function problematic as audiences are notoriously fickle and the assumptions surrounding possible market reaction to a program must often be formed well in advance. Thus, these *a priori* judgements are "guess work" which occurs amid fundamental considerations of retaining a station's network identity and building the prime time audience needed to maximize an entire evening's schedule ratings.

In 57 television markets this fall, ABC affiliates chose to preempt a major new network offering in the face of a nationwide controversy. The tumult and attention generated by "NYPD Blue" prior to its debut exceeded that of any television program in recent memory. Even so, the show became the season's highest rated new drama, received a full 22-episode order, and was hailed by

Newsweek as “simply the best new show on television" ("Blue in the Night," 1993).

This research applies the gatekeeping metaphor to the decision process within an entertainment context and creates an index that measures audience objection to specific programming attributes. It then tests this Audience Objections Index's (AOI) efficiency through an assessment of audience reaction to a specific case of local gatekeeping, the preemption of “NYPD Blue."

In televised entertainment programming, the gatekeeper at the organizational level runs a risk of financial loss should a decision be made that upsets or angers consumers. Therefore, program pretesting by the major television networks is standard practice. Testing for “NYPD Blue" included airings on cable leased access channels followed by prearranged interviews (Schmuckler, 1993). And yet, the degree to which such testing is generalizable to the reactions within a given broadcast market is uncertain and therefore represents an imperfect barometer for programming decisions made in specific broadcast markets.

Local station managers normally lack such sophisticated means for testing viewer response to a program and instead make estimates based on personal knowledge of the market and its audience. In a fashion similar to an oil field explorer, they rely on a subjective probability based on past experience and judgement to make decisions on future events, hoping that not all the wells will turn out to be dry (Megill, 1984). The limited direct feedback in the form of audience letters, threats of boycotts, or protests may also play a factor in the decision to run a program. Given the possible fluctuations and the uncertainty of audience tastes and tolerance, this task appears most formidable. Himmelweit, Swift, and Jaeger (1980) pointed to the difficulty of such a task:

> “A combination of high risk and high stakes are the very conditions under which, in the absence of *proper* feedback, the folklore about

> the audience's tastes and reactions are likely to flourish." (emphasis added)

This paper seeks to supply some of this feedback in the form of empirical evidence regarding audience reactions to a television station's decision to not air "NYPD Blue." The situation investigated—a market where local protests, boycott threats, and media attention preceded the show's premiere—was an ideal opportunity to analyze audience perception of appropriate gatekeeping and to measure tolerance levels for the kind of content traditionally not shown on broadcast television.

The Local Affiliate and Network Programming Relationship

For the local station, the affiliation agreement carries the immediate reward of a ready supply of high quality programming, an enhanced advertising environment, financial compensation for time cleared, and an exclusive franchise over a defined geographical area. Though network compensation payments continue to be a contentious issue, the programming advantages which accrue from this marriage of convenience are obvious for the local outlet. To paraphrase John Milton, "it is better to serve in heaven as an affiliate than to reign in hell as an independent." In other words, given the competitive environment of the local television marketplace, it is extremely difficult for a station to "go it alone."

From the major broadcast network's perspective one of the primary efficiencies associated with television networking is that a single program can be shared across an extensive affiliate system. Competitive advantage results from the network's ability to spread the costs of programming over a wider audience base (Owen, Beebe and Manning, 1974). At the same time, the marginal costs of adding new audience is deemed to be slight because the first copy costs of a program have already been met. Moreover, the aggregated audience which results provides the basis for selling advertising time to national advertisers in a single transaction.

Despite these efficiencies, the arrangement still represents a conundrum for networks that must rely upon local affiliates to clear time and air network programming. The creation of a nationwide audience is dependent on those clearance decisions, each made at the local station level. This circumstance is the result of the U.S. television system's concept of localism and licensing obligations which demand that community standards and values be taken into account in program scheduling decisions. For the network, the harsh implications of widespread preemption of a program are likely to be felt in overall ratings, which in turn affect advertising rates, and ultimately affect the profitability of the network itself. For the affiliate, failure to preempt programs judged inappropriate by the local audience may adversely affect station ratings and ultimately jeopardize its licence to "serve in the public interest."

Nevertheless, affiliates remain acutely dependent on network programming, typically relying on the network for roughly 60 percent of their total schedule lineup (Haldi, 1985). Local affiliates do retain the right to reject network programming by an FCC mandate (1941). Though rare, such decisions have been made, particularly in cases where attractive syndication offerings (e.g. "Star Trek: The Next Generation") and/or declines in local market ratings ("Monday Night Football" in the mid-1980s) generated ratings that provided clear indication that a larger share of the local audience could be obtained with non-network programs. Yet, during the entire decade of the 1980's, preemption of network programming accounted for less than a 1.5 percent loss in national household coverage for the major television networks (Owen and Wildman, 1992). Programming decisions at both the network and the affiliate level always involve a certain level of risk, however, and the willingness to accept such risk increases as the television market grows ever more competitive.

Turow (1992), in discussing the risks associated with media industries, blamed a general lack of innovation on organizational structures and the fear of a potential "chain reaction" ignited by "unconventionally creative actions." The bureaucratic committee system of programming at the network level comprises just such an organizational structure. Turow suggested that breaks from the norm or unconventional television programming are the products of some unexpected "tension-inducing" changes affecting both the networks and production firms. The eruption of this tension heralds the inception, development, and release of unconventional or riskier program innovations. Similar to the equilibrium upset within a marketplace wrought by a technological "gale of creative destruction" suggested by economist Joseph Schumpeter (1942), competing technologies have rearranged the programming landscape and narrowed the local station's niche.

In the face of tension generated by substantial cable and video cassette inroads into network audiences, ABC called upon a producer with a proven track record and a successful formulae to create an innovative and even controversial program for network distribution. Steven Bochco's previous efforts include "Hill Street Blues," and "L.A. Law," as well as his innovative, but short-lived "Cop Rock." With "NYPD Blue," the network used a proven risk-reduction strategy to generate an innovative and even controversial response to the "R-rated" offerings of the new technology that increasingly threatens the networks' audience share.

The Local Programming Decision as Gatekeeping

As made clear by the FCC Report on Chain Broadcasting (1941) (which dealt with radio but is also applied to television networking) a broadcast station cannot delegate its responsibility for programming functions to the network. Prior to the prerecording of network programs, networks commonly supplied skeletal information to affiliates which merely included data about the length of the series, length of each program, name of the sponsor, type of program, and in some cases the persons appearing on the program. Of course such limited information made any real assessment of a program's content virtually impossible when it came to public interest considerations (FCC, 1941). In television, this situation changed dramatically with the advent of video recording. Affiliates previewed program offerings and exercised increasing oversight prior to making clearance decisions. Prerecording removed much of the local affiliates' uncertainty about what they would be airing, but uncertainty about audience reaction remained.

The program director who exerts a preview-based control and makes "in or out" decisions that influence which programs are available to the public is functioning as a gatekeeper. Although the gatekeeping metaphor has generally been applied to news decisions in the communication context, Lewin originally suggested the theoretical framework could be applied more generally to other decision-making processes in communication channels (Lewin, 1951). The concept of gatekeeping is most often attached to news gathering and decisions regarding news-related information and has recently been extended to include television news (Berkowitz, 1990). But it is both relevant and applicable to decisions involving communication for entertainment purposes as well.

Two gates are involved in the controversy surrounding the "NYPD Blue" preemption examined here. In the first gate, the local station's decision at first appears to be limited to a binary choice involving either the acceptance or rejection of a network offering. But when viewed in the broader context of syndicated offerings, the gatekeeper's decision is an initial reject/accept followed by a selection from a large number of alternative programs in the case of preemption. The second gate is controlled by the individual viewer who decides which television channel to select (from perhaps thirty or more) for viewing during a particular time slot.

Gatekeeping is subject to "decision rules" which are established both implicitly and explicitly within an organization or by an individual (Shoemaker, 1991). Although the exact nature of these rules varies across differing media organizations and across different levels of analysis, we might fully expect the application of these rules by the affiliate to be guided to a great extent by anticipation of the station's target audience response. Wright and Barbour (1976) described a "risk model" applicable to the organizational level wherein the decision maker may evaluate risk of losses or failures associated with each option and select the one that entails the least risk. For example, a television gatekeeper may be able to select between two programming providers, one with a proven track record of producing high ratings, another with an unestablished record. The risk model predicts the selection of the former. In most situations, the networks provide just such a record of performance for the local station.

The actual measurement of risk may be arrived at through the use of relative frequencies, *a priori* judgments, deductive, or subjective definitions of probability (Hammond, 1968). If a program is aired: How will it be greeted by viewers? Will it attract an audience of sufficient numbers? Will it be offensive and/or alienate viewers? Will it attract local sponsors? Often it is the assessment of risk or uncertainty that becomes the pivotal point for decisions in these matters of choice (Slovic, 1968). For any firm whose primary goal is profit maximization, the best that can be done is to estimate the probability of success which may result from its various strategies of a short or long term nature (Farrar, 1962; Mansfield, 1983). Paradoxically, here risk avoidance may mean choosing not to air a program for fear of offending the audience, at the same time this action may mean not taking advantage of a program that proves to be a ratings winner, thus in itself representing a form of economic risk.[1]

At the individual level, Steiner (1952), Beebe (1977), Spence-Owen (1977) and others have offered useful models of program choice that may be seen as forms of self-initiated gatekeeping by viewers. Wright and Barbour (1976) outlined an "affect-referral strategy" where the decision maker (or consumer in their example) relies on rather vague "feelings" about the available options rather than on a comparison of detailed information about them. The decision could be to pick the "best" program being aired at a particular time, but the individual gatekeeper might also pick one that seemed simply "least objectionable." More directly, decisions are based on a self-assigned hierarchy of global values and beliefs, but the particular heuristic used to evaluate specific choices is flexible and only loosely defined. For example, the individual gatekeeper might hold a global evaluation that contemporary dramatic action is generally more entertaining than situation comedies, but that every program should contain some lesson or moral. Given a cursory appraisal of the available programming, that strategy might lead to selection of a drama or a comedy with a lesson, depending on a quick assessment about which will most likely provide the best entertainment.

Purpose

This research measures the extent of audience agreement with a station manager's decision to preempt airing of "NYPD Blue" and examines audience perceptions of the circumstances under which stations are justified in preempting any prime time program. To do so, it develops an Audience Objections Index, a summary measure that indicates an individual's level of tolerance for affiliate's gatekeeping decisions and that can be used to rank order program attributes found objectionable by the local audience.

Additionally, the research investigates the relative affect of the AOI, community affiliation, political orientation, and perceptions of television influence on respondents' level of agreement with a local station's decision to preempt airing of "NYPD Blue". The research is guided by these general research questions:

RQ1. Did the audience agree or disagree with the local station's decision not to air "NYPD Blue?"

RQ2. What controversial program attributes might an audience perceive as objectionable and as sufficient reason for preempting a program?

RQ3: What is the nature of the local audience in terms of political orientation, community affiliation, tolerance of local programming control, and perception of television influence.

RQ4. How well does the AOI predict reaction to a particular gatekeeping decision when controlling for political orientation, community affiliation, and perceptions of television influence?

Method

A telephone survey was conducted over three evenings, October 6th through 8th, a period following three consecutive weeks in which "NYPD Blue" was preempted in the local market. The broadcast market under study is market ranked in the top 100 and the DMA includes portions of a predominantly rural three state region. Prior to the premiere, the general manager (who is also program director) of the ABC affiliate announced his intention to judge the appropriateness of the program on a week to week basis and had rejected the first three episodes.[2] The survey was conducted during the third week of the season when no area station was broadcasting the program.

Local media coverage of the decision not to air "NYPD Blue" was extensive. Local newspapers, television and radio stations all devoted coverage to the controversy, and the general manager of the affiliated station appeared nationally on ABC's "Good Morning America" to explain his decision. The station had been picketed by protestors several weeks before the station manager announced his decision. In the announcement he explained that the decision not to broadcast "NYPD Blue" was neither the result of protests or boycott threats, but rather his determination of inappropriateness of the first three episodes in light of local community standards.

In order to sample local public opinion about the decision, a random list of telephone numbers was computer generated and stratified to include a representative cross-section of the exchanges within the television station's primary coverage area.[3] Interviews were conducted with persons 18 years or older using the last birthday method and averaged 20 minutes in duration. A total of 407 surveys completed surveys were compiled by trained telephone interviewers. The completion rate was 43 percent.

Measurement

Respondents who indicated they were aware of the local affiliate's decision to preempt "NYPD Blue" were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the decision and responses were scored using a five-point Lickert-like scale (5=Strongly Agree to 1=Strongly Disagree). Then an open-ended question asked respondents what they thought was the main reason the station decided not to show the program.

Next, respondents were presented with several statements dealing generally with television influence and were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each on the same five-point scale described above. The two attitudinal statements used in this study were:

- "Television can have a very powerful effect on the ways in which people behave."
- "If people don't like what's on TV, the best thing to do is turn off the set."

These attitudinal statement gauge respondent perceptions of TV's impact and the notion of personal efficacy in the face of that impact.

All 407 respondents were then asked a series of twelve questions dealing with specific content attributes which were presented as possible reasons for preempting a program during prime time. Each reason for preemption was assigned a value of five (5) if the response was, "yes, that's an appropriate reason," a value of zero if the response was "it depends," and a value of negative five (-5) if the response was "no, that's not an appropriate reason." This provided a transitive measure which reacts to both possible polar responses. The sum of all 12 response scores yielded a composite measure labeled the Audience Objections Index (AOI), defined as the degree to which an individual perceives restriction of program content by local affiliates as acceptable. Positive scores indicate higher levels of tolerance for local gatekeeping. Negative scores indicate lower levels of tolerance.

The items comprising the AOI are listed below. In each case they were followed by the general question: "is that an appropriate reason not to show it locally?"

"If a particular network program shows people being killed,...?'
"If a program shows people using illegal drugs,...?"
"If a program shows people abusing alcohol,...?"
"If a program is racist,...?"
"If a program rejects Christian teachings,...?"
"If a program advocates exreme right-wing viewpoints,...?"
"If a program advocates homosexual lifestyles,...?"
"If a program has people using profanity,...?"
"If a program shows male nudity,...?"
"If a program advocates extreme left-wing viewpoints,...?"
"If a program is sexist,...?"
"If a program shows female nudity,...?"

At the end of the interview, respondents were asked a series of demographic questions. In addition to age, sex, and education level, respondents were asked "In how many civic, fraternal, religious, or professional organizations are you currently active?" and "How often do you attend church per month?" As a measure of perceived political orientation, respondents were asked, "On a scale of one to ten, where one is politically very liberal and 10 is very conservative, where would you rank yourself?"

Findings

Respondent Profile

The average age of all respondents was slightly over 40 years, with a range of 18 to 78 years of age. From these, 73 percent were in the key television demographic of 18 to 49 years of age. The sample was 56 percent women.

As for education, six percent had less than high school, 19 percent finished high school, 34 percent had some college, 22 percent had four year college degrees, and 18 percent had some graduate study. Average church attendance was 2.3 times per month. Self reported political orientation averaged 5.48 on a 10-point scale (10=very conservative to 1=very liberal) with a standard deviation of 2.25.

Respondents who were aware of the station decision to preempt "NYPD Blue" answered the question "How do you feel about the station's decision not to show 'NYPD Blue?'" Within that sub-sample of the population (n=275) those indicating either strong disagreement or disagreement with the decision (41 percent) (x=2.93) outnumbered those who strongly agreed or agreed (38 percent), with a remaining 21 percent having no feeling regarding the station decision. Within the sub-sample, 32 percent believed that "local protest and threats of a station boycott" led to the decision not to air the program, 30 percent thought "local TV standards" were the reason, 21 percent expressed a variety of other reasons ranging from "economic" to "a need for more country western music shows," and an additional 17 percent were "unsure."

Attitudes Towards Television Control and Power

Eighty five percent either strongly agreed or agreed that "If people don't like what's on TV, the best thing they can do is turn it off" (x=4.09, sd=.98). This seems to reflect belief in a self-initiated control over the TV gate. We term this "Self Control of TV". Thirty three percent strongly agreed and 48 percent agreed that "Television can have a powerful effect on the ways in which people behave" (x=4.00, sd=1.0). This suggests that most viewers perceive television as a powerful information source having an impact on behavior. We term this "Powerful Effects of TV." Both of these attitudinal measures were on a five point scale (5=Strongly Agree to 1=Strongly Disagree)

Audience Objections Index

The AOI measures a viewer's general tolerance for programming decisions at the local network affiliate gate. The score represents the sum of response values to a 12-item index ranging from -60 (complete objection to any tested program attribute passing through the affiliate gate) to +60 (no objection the local station allowing any tested program attribute pass through the gate).[4]. The mean response was -18 with a standard deviation of 37 indicating considerable variation across the sample (n=407).

Seventy respondents (17.2 percent) were anchored on the extreme end of the continuum with a score of -60. For these people, none of the identified reasons was sufficient for a local station to preempt a program. At the other extreme end of the continuum are 14 respondents (3.4 percent) who identified all 12 reasons for preemption as acceptable. The overall distribution is skewed positively. Recall that each score is any combination of "yes, reason to preempt" (5) and "not a reason to preempt" (-5) responses. Since 51.9 percent of AOI scores were -25 or greater, the majority found no more than seven of the twelve items so objectionable that they would tolerate preemption by the local affiliate. Overall, there appears to be a tendency toward low acceptance levels of gatekeeping activity by the local affiliate. See Figure 1.

The means for each of the individual items comprising the AOI also provide a rank ordering of objectionable program attributes—attributes so objectionable that they were in many viewers' minds enough to justify preemption by the local affiliate. The audience identified scenes of male nudity as the most objectionable program attribute followed closely by espousal of racist viewpoints and scenes of female nudity, and use of profanity. Extremist political viewpoints were seen as the least objectionable. See Table 1.

The AOI as a Predictor of Audience Reaction to Preemption

If the AOI is a reasonable measure of audience tolerance of gatekeeping at the local network affiliate level it should exert considerable influence in predicting an audience's level of agreement with a specific preemption decision.[5] To test its predictive power, the AOI and eight other variables were regressed on the response to the question asking how strongly the respondent agreed or disagreed with the preemption decision. A stepwise method was used to enter the variables into the equation with a probability of F-to-enter of .05.

The resulting equation explained a considerable portion of the total variance in the dependent variable. R Square was .51 and the F value was 43.45. The AOI was the first variable to enter the equation and by itself accounted for slightly more than 33 percent of the variance. Four additional variables also entered the equation—Self Control of TV, Political Orientation, Church Attendance, and Powerful Effects of TV. Four variables did not enter the equation as specified--Sex, Age, Education, and Organization Membership. See Table 2.

Discussion

This study examined audience reaction to the preemption of a controversial network offering—"NYPD Blue"—within a gatekeeping framework applied to entertainment communication. It developed and tested an Audience Objections Index as a measure of audience tolerance of local gatekeeping and as an indication of program attributes the audience finds most objectionable. It tested this AOI by regressing it and a number of control variables onto a criterion variable related to a specific incidence of preemption.

The gatekeeping metaphor provides a solid theoretical base for modeling the decisions involved in local affiliate programming decisions as well as those individual television viewers make as they select an evening's entertainment fare. Although generally thought of in terms of news selection, gatekeeping was originally conceived as a model for a wide range of group and individual level communication processes.

The AOI proved to be a reliable measure of program attributes audiences find so objectionable that they are willing to accede control of the decision gate. It also provides a workable predictor of audience reaction to preemption of particular program offerings. The high Chronbach's alpha offers statistical evidence of the index's reliability. The regression results confirm the the index's reliability as a predictive measure. Therefore, it may offer considerable utility in reducing the inherent uncertainty in deciding whether an audience will tolerate specific controversial programming.

The component parts of the AOI can indicate what a particular audience finds most objectionable and therefore what is most likely to evoke support for an affiliate who decides to preempt a specific program. In the case examined here, the audience identified male and female nudity, profanity, and racism as most objectionable. These are the most reactive attributes in the AOI because they violate what we currently accept as appropriate for broadcast television. "NYPD Blue" was reported to have all of these attributes in quantity. It pushed the traditional boundaries into a content realm formerly reserved for the motion picture theater, but increasingly available in the home as well.

For example, "male nudity" evoked the most objection in this particular market. But male nudity in this society is an infrequent phenomenon generally, aside from museum statues and locker rooms. Perhaps the strength of the objection is a reaction to the seemingly extreme deviation from television conventions and a larger expected societal norm. Interestingly, "NYPD Blue" with its portrayal of a naked Detective Sipowicz in bed with a hooker and a naked Detective John Kelly rolling in bed with an attractive female rookie officer tests the limits of TV's conventions. This is what the press focused its reports on.

The push into new content areas was made by a network addressing a national audience. But the local affiliate must make its decision in light of a smaller, more homogeneous market. In this case, "NYPD Blue" was preempted—it was not passed through the gate because the management guessed that the local audience would object to the program's content.

And even though the show contained most of the most objectionable attributes (or at least what people knew of the show's attributes), only 40 percent agreed with the local station's decision to preempt. This is not counter to what the AOI predicted. Indeed, every one of the items in the index showed a negative score. This means not a single program attribute was so objectionable that a majority of respondents were willing to concede their control over the viewing decision to the local station manager. Even in a conservative, rural market, the audience as a whole is extremely reluctant to allow a local station to deny them their access to a network offering that the rest of the country will see. As is clear in Figure 1, audience preference is that the individual members exercise control of programming selection.

Perhaps most revealing are the results from the regression analysis itself. That the AOI responded well in terms of the explained variance is clear. What is also worth considering here are the contributions made by the other variables within the final equation. Political orientation and church attendance are powerful predictors as well. This seems to suggest that audiences are more than just an undifferentiated mass market. Rather, an audience is comprised of a collection of previously formed groups that inhabit a geographical area within the reach of a broadcast signal.

In this vein, McQuail (1987) asserts that an audience "is a collectivity which is formed either in response to media (channels and content) or out of independently existing social forces (when it corresponds to an existing social group or category or the result of activities by a local group to provide itself with its own channels of communication (media)." Often it is inextricably both at the same time. The possibility exists that we are dealing with at least "two" television audiences—each with its own motivations for activity.

McQuail defines a "public" audience as a pre-existing active, interactive and largely autonomous social group which is served by particular media but does not depend on the media for its existence. Such public audiences tends to coincide with membership of the most active members in pre-existing community (Stamm, 1985). It is more likely to have interpersonal interaction between its members and a sense of group identity or purpose. It is likely to remain stable over time and to respond to media actions in public forum. Those who protested the local showing of "NYPD Blue" were perhaps just such a public audience.

"Market" audience is defined as a product/consumer relationship rather than a social or moral one. In this relationship, preemption denies the audience economic opportunity. Loyalty to the network or more broadly to the media is actively encouraged for commercial reasons. In this way, the market audience takes on some aspects of the public audience like long-term stability, boundaries, awareness of identity. Still, this market audience is much more likely predicated on a self-interest at the individual level rather than a group-interest motivation at the societal level.

Church attendance entered the equation because it predicts audience agreement with the affiliate's decision to preempt. This suggests that church going may be a self-defining public that acts independently within the market audience. That the "organization" variable did not similarly enter the equation suggests that either the measurement was inadequate or that the public measured was uninterested in the preemption decision.

The two attitudinal measures did enter the equation, however. Individuals who express higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to object to preemption decisions and to reserve control over programming for themselves. Conversely, individuals who view television as having powerful effects are more likely to submit to external control exercised by the local station. These and other attitudinal measures deserve additional attention in future investigations.

Indeed, additional attention from communication scholars into the phenomenon of information access seems warranted by the results of this exploratory investigation. As the sheer volume of content available to the individual increases in the information age, the old public policy idea of the broadcaster as an appropriate controller of a local information gate may seem increasingly antiquated. It may well be that in an era of abundant information, individuals may see themselves as the only appropriate keepers of the gates.

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Notes

[1] Greene (1971) described three theoretical models of handling risk: risk assumption, risk avoidance, and risk combination. Risk Assumption is the acceptance of risk, usually in cases where economic situations can justify it. Often this is in response to conditions brought on by industry pressures. Risk Avoidance, as the term implies, is simply avoiding being subjected to the possibility of loss. Taken to the extreme this could mean withdrawal from certain competitive areas by failure to offer certain program types. Risk Combination is exposure to risk across a number of dissimilar enterprises which smooths out the expected fluctuations in profit and loss connected to each enterprise. In programming terms this translates to program diversity when program types are considered the enterprise and renewal or cancellation are the rough equivalents of profit and loss.

[2] On the second day of the telephone survey the local Fox affiliate announced that it would become the second non-ABC station in the country to carry "NYPD Blue" in the coming weeks.

[3] Because local area dialing exchanges do not match broadcast market areas, only telephones within a 75-mile radius of the station were sampled. While this does not include all of the entire market, it did capture the central core and did not include any persons who might have been able to receive the signal of a distant affiliate that was broadcasting the program.

[4] Reliability analysis on the index produced Cronbach's alpha = .91.

[5] According to the responses to a filter question, 132 people had no knowledge of the situation surrounding "NYPD Blue" and were therefore excluded from the regression analysis. Additionally, listwise deletion of cases with missing values was used, further decreasing the number of cases in the analysis to 216.

Figure 1. **Distribution of Respondent Scores on the Audience Objections Index**
(higher values indicate greater objection)

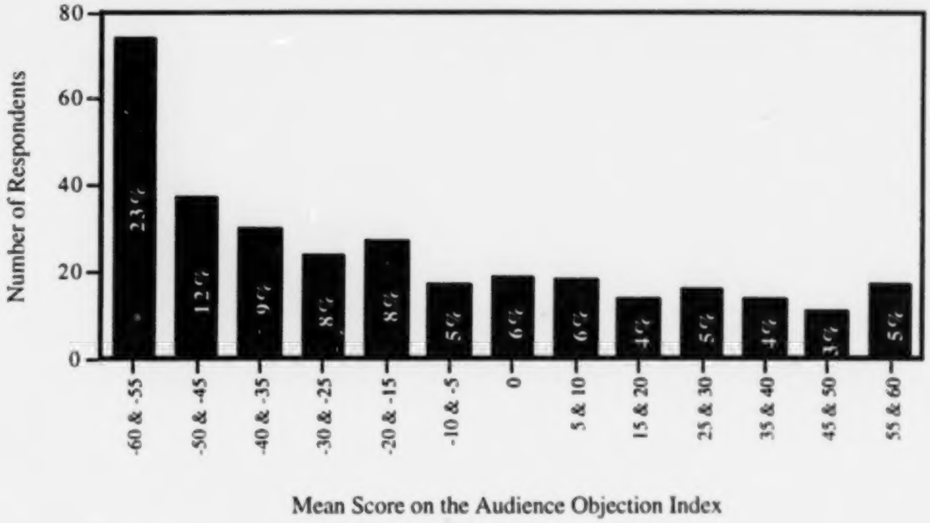

Table 1. **Rank Ordering of Individual Items Comprising the Audience Objections Index**
(higher values indicate greater objection)

Statements below all followed by: "is that an appropriate reason not to show it locally?"	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	N
"If a program shows male nudity,...?"	-.10	4.86	398
"If a program is racist,...?"	-.48	4.53	392
"If a program shows female nudity,...?"	-.56	4.85	403
"If a program has people using profanity,...?"	-1.13	4.52	400
"If a program is sexist,...?"	-1.33	4.47	391
"If a program advocates homosexual lifestyles,...?"	-1.35	4.53	389
"If a program shows people using illegal drugs,...?"	-1.47	4.35	398
"If a program rejects Christian teachings,...?"	-1.65	4.36	390
"If a program shows people abusing alcohol,...?"	-1.85	4.20	400
"If a program shows people being killed,...?"	-1.93	4.10	391
"If a program advocates extreme left-wing viewpoints,...?"	-2.06	4.18	369
"If a program advocates extreme right-wing viewpoints,...?"	-2.10	4.19	367

Table 2. Regression on Level of Audience Agreement with Affiliate's Decision to Preempt "NYPD Blue"

R square	.5085
Standard Error	1.0116
F	43.454**

	df	sum of squares	mean square
regression	5	222.349	44.469
residual	210	214.910	1.023

variables in the equation	b	SE b	Beta	t
Audience Objection Index	.0154	.0002	.3854	6.907**
Self Control of TV	-.3172	.0732	-.2191	-4.331**
Political Orientation	.1352	.0337	.2169	4.006**
Church Attendance	.0788	.0265	.1553	2.072*
Powerful Effects of TV	.2133	.0742	.1477	2.873*
(constant)	2.7029	.5106		5.293**

variables not in the equation	Beta if in	Partial	t
Sex	.0921	.1268	1.848
Education	-.0782	-.1020	-1.483
Age	.0709	.0968	1.407
Organization Membership	-.0165	-.0228	-.330

* p<.005 ** p<.0001

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TRAGEDY ON BAYOU CANOT!
NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE WRECK OF AMTRAK'S SUNSET LIMITED

A paper presented to the
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Abstract

TRAGEDY ON BAYOU CANOT!
NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE WRECK OF AMTRAK'S SUNSET LIMITED

Using the 1993 crash of Amtrak's Sunset Limited in Mobile, Alabama, this study examines the safety education provided by seven newspapers. A total of 117 news stories were analyzed for five primary areas: overall story category, passenger safety theme, train personnel safety theme, train safety theme, and rescue safety. Sixty-three percent were found to contain at least one safety theme paragraph within the larger story. A total of 631 paragraphs were identified as safety theme paragraphs, 32 percent of which were passenger safety themes, 8 percent were train personnel safety, 31 percent were train safety, and 29 percent were rescue safety themes. As in previous research, safety themes rarely appeared alone; more often than not, a story contained a mixture of all the themes. Some safety themes were stronger than others but together they present a view of the safety issues surrounding the crash.

Safety themes are embedded within a story framework which reflects the three stages of disaster news work. Images of normalcy tragically disrupted by the crash abound as do images of passengers escaping and aiding others. Disaster relief personnel and aviation officials are shown working to restore order and solve the mystery of the crash. Within this framework we can learn what to expect when a train crashes and what we might have to do in a similar situation.

TRAGEDY ON BAYOU CANOT!
NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE WRECK OF AMTRAK'S SUNSET LIMITED

The wreck of the Sunset Limited[1]

Only minutes past 3 a.m. on September 22, 1993, Amtrak's coast-to-coast Sunset Limited passenger train derailed while crossing a bridge over a desolate swamp area just inside the Mobile city limits near Saraland, Alabama. The train's three locomotive engines and four of its eight cars plunged into the murky, 25-foot waters of Bayou Canot, killing 47 people. A section of the bridge collapsed during the wreck, leaving one car hanging over the edge. At first, no one knew what caused the disastrous derailment. However, as day broke on the scene, more and more details were discovered. No one knew at the time, but the accident was the deadliest crash in the 23-year history of Amtrak.

The Sunset Limited was on the last third of its 3,066-mile, 68-hour run between Los Angeles and Miami. Mobile, Alabama was the last stop for the train before the accident. Less than a half-hour before the train left Mobile, and only a few miles from the depot, a towboat operator became disoriented in the nighttime fog and darkness of the Mobile River. For no readily apparent reason, the towboat and its string of barges turned off the river and into Bayou Canot, a small tributary forbidden for passage by industrial river traffic. At least one of the barges in tow struck a piling supporting the Bayou Canot railroad bridge, weakening its load capacity. Just 20 minutes later, the Amtrak train moved onto the bridge at a speed of 70 miles per hour. The damaged bridge gave way under the weight of the three locomotives which weighed nearly 300,000 pounds each.

For the survivors, their families, and the victims' families, the ordeal was just beginning. Passengers in critical condition were taken to the University of South Alabama Medical Center, and other survivors were scattered at other hospitals. Initially, 126 survivors were confirmed with minor injuries. At least fifteen others were reported missing. An incomplete passenger list served only to add to the confusion. Ultimately, it was concluded that there were 189 passengers and 17 crew members aboard the Sunset Limited at the time of the wreck. The Coast Guard used scuba divers, boats and helicopters to search the waters for other victims believed killed or still trapped. Firefighters and numerous other rescue personnel also joined the effort at the accident site which could be reached only by boat, helicopter, or on the train track itself.

When the train came to its final abrupt stop, one of two conductors in the dining car quickly radioed the engineer. His attempt for a response was futile. He had no way of knowing that the engineer and two crew members were buried along with their engine in the mud of Bayou Canot. Immediately, the conductors took charge. First, they calmed passengers, and then they picked up a radio and called, "Mayday, mayday, mayday." The message was received by a CSX operator in Mobile. Almost at the same moment, the operator of the wayward towboat radioed the U.S. Coast Guard.

On the train, passengers and crew were in fear for their lives. They had been thrown around and tossed about in the cars. In the darkness, they could see only by the glowing light of flames from two burning cars. They felt water rushing in and engulfing them. Someone screamed: "Oh my God. We're all going to die." That's when the heroes stepped forward. One passenger was personally credited with helping 30 people to safety.

There was confusion about when the accident actually occurred. Rescuers were slow to respond, and were hampered by the smoke, darkness, and the remote, highly inaccessible location of the wreck. The rescuers were from the Coast Guard, the Mobile County Sheriff's Department and its Flotilla, the Fire Department, the Marines, and any number of other volunteers. They were hampered in their efforts by a swamp swarming with snakes, alligators, and insects. The water was muddy and offered zero visibility. Divers were forced to feel their way around for victims.

Communication from the swamp was slow. Only a few local Mobile reporters were lucky enough to make it to the site before the Coast Guard cordoned off the area. They became the eyes and ears for other media professionals around the country and around the world. Most reporters were held at bay some five miles away at the Port of Chickasaw, where temporary morgues were set up nearby. Media representatives turned their attention to the downtown Mobile hotel which was used as a headquarters for survivors and families of survivors and victims.

The Amtrak Sunset Limited disaster was a top story in Mobile, the U.S., and worldwide. This paper focuses on the newspaper coverage of this disaster and the safety information conveyed to the reader. The paper begins with a brief outline of previous journalism and mass communication disaster research.

Disaster Research in Mass Communication

Though often maligned and criticized, the general public relies heavily on mass media to provide information about what should be done in a disaster situation (Blong, 1985; Garner, 1987; Sorenson, 1983). Readers, listeners, and viewers count on media to tell them how to deal with the disaster, death, and the guilt felt by survivors (Elliot, 1989).

A vast amount of research on disasters and mass media has tended to concentrate on the affected community or the role of the media in the disaster (Carter, 1980; Christensen & Ruch, 1978; Kreps, 1980; Medsger, 1989; Quarantelli, 1989; Raphael, 1986; Rogers & Sood, 1980). Message content studies of disasters are less prevalent and typically have focused on inadequacies of news coverage and tendencies to perpetuate myths (Blong, 1985; Goltz, 1984; Scanlon & Frizzell, 1979; Scanlon, Tuukko & Morton, 1978; Quarantelli, 1978, 1988; Wenger, 1985; Wenger & Friedman, 1986). A popular myth is that when confronted with loss of life or limb, persons will panic and engage in some form of antisocial behavior. Indeed panic is very rare in such situations and typically occurs only under particular circumstances (Quarantelli & Dynes, 1972; Quarantelli, 1976, 1977, 1983, 1989). In airplane disasters, it has been discovered that passengers do not tend to panic or respond at all -- not out of shock, but because they do not have leadership or ample safety information (Safety Study, 1985). Other myths include the helpless portrayal of individuals or organizations in handling weather, or economic and political policies which threaten them. Conversely, representatives of mass media are seen as concerned and protective of the public, particularly when avoiding information which may cause mass panic (Wilkins, 1985, 1986).

Other researchers have concentrated on inadequate newspaper coverage of disasters. Inaccuracies within disaster stories are common and can be found primarily in news stories which lack attribution or any source information (Scanlon, Tuukko, & Morton, 1978; Scanlon & Frizzell, 1979; Scanlon & Alldred, 1982). Additionally, disaster news can be distorted with inordinate importance placed on the impact period rather than risk mitigation (Scanlon & Alldred, 1982). Singer and Endreny (1987) discovered information about related harms to be present in news stories, but indications of hazard probability were not. Public assessment of potential risks, then, was difficult to make.

An analysis of television journalists' accounts of plane crashes revealed three overall themes: "(a) the tragic intervention of fate into everyday life; (b) the mystery of what caused the crash; and, (c) the work of legitimate authority to restore normalcy" (Vincent, Crow, & Davis, 1989, p. 21). The themes help encourage "naive beliefs about the safety of air travel" (p. 24). The research reported here differs in two key ways from these findings. First, this study focuses on the safety behavior information presented in the news, and not on the journalist who creates the news. Second, the study centers on newspaper coverage, not television, of a transportation accident.

In regard to existing literature on disasters, particularly those which have involved mass transportation, Garner (1993) observed:

> . . . scholars have looked at disaster news but the focus has been primarily on the myths and the deficiencies of news coverage. It has not focused on images of appropriate disaster behavior, including preparation and response. The research that has been done is important, however, because it has helped us to understand that people (a) do learn from the mass media and (b) that what they learn can be erroneous and/or harmful. It should be noted, however, that not all scholars see this as being problematic. (p. 5)

Vincent et al. (1989) stated:

> . . . news about air crashes may serve to perpetuate naive beliefs . . . [and] this handling of air crash stories can be viewed as quite responsible. Journalists might alarm millions needlessly if they exaggerated the importance of inconsistent details about an accident. (p. 24)

Garner (1993), however, argued:

> On the other hand, this practice encourages the perpetuation of disaster myths; encourages the public's belief that flying is safe and that there is little they can do about their own safety in a disaster situation; and that relevant agencies are ensuring their safety when, in fact, this may not be happening at all. Finally, it raises important questions about the nature of disaster news work which encourages these practices. (p. 5)

Focusing on the August 31, 1988, crash of Delta 1141 at the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, Garner's (1993) study centered on two areas: safety information which the mass media presented to the public in coverage of an airplane disaster; and, the "world view of aviation safety" presented by the mass media to the reader (p. 9).

The Study

The methodology for this research is based in part on Garner's study of newspaper coverage of the crash of Delta 1141. The first major difference is that the focal point here is the crash of Amtrak's Sunset Limited coast-to-coast passenger train. Though Garner examined text, photographs, and diagrams, this research is limited to text only. The crash of the Sunset Limited was chosen for at least two reasons. First, it satisfies Garner's criteria of including survivors. According to Garner (1993): ". . . most crashes are survivable and the disaster [should] be as 'typical' as possible, not an exception to the rule" (p. 10). Second, because train crashes have received little if any attention from mass media researchers, the authors hoped to discover any differences or similarities in newspaper coverage of airplane and train disasters.

This study concentrated on the first five days of coverage by seven newspapers. Story selection was based on location of the disaster, the trip's origin, the destination, and major cities through which the train passed on its coast-to-coast run. The authors believed these cities would have the largest amount of newspaper coverage and would originate many of the stories appearing in papers outside the disaster region. The papers used in the study were: Mobile Press Register (crash site paper), Los Angeles Times (trip origin paper), Phoenix Gazette, Arizona Republic, Houston Chronicle, New Orleans Times-Picayune (cities passed before crash), and Orlando Sentinel (trip destination paper).

To best accomplish the objectives of the study, thematic analysis was chosen as the research method. All Sunset Limited newspaper stories related to the disaster over the five-day period from the time of the disaster were analyzed. Each was analyzed for five key areas: overall story category, passenger safety theme, train personnel safety theme, train safety theme, and rescue theme. The coding unit for each safety theme was the paragraph. Multiple codings were possible for both story category and safety themes. Two primary coders analyzed every story. Two secondary coders examined one of every four stories. However, each secondary coder analyzed separate stories with no duplication.

The overall story category, or central point of the story, was determined to be the most appropriate method of concluding the context in which safety themes appeared. Ten overall story categories were discovered:

Accident/Crash: Stories focusing on the crash itself.

Crash Site Rescue: Rescue efforts at the crash site.

Crash Site Train: Examination or investigations of the train.

Passenger Stories: Passengers' experiences, their lives, etc.

Victim Stories: Stories about those who perished in the crash.

Rescue Workers: Descriptions of training, work prior to or during the crash.

Other Aid: Stories about the community in which the crash occurred, witnesses, survivors helping others.

Previous Crash Stories: Stories about previous train crashes.

Op/Ed: Articles about the crash appearing on the Op/Ed page.

Other: Crash stories which did not fit any other categories.

Briefly, passenger safety themes were defined as references to such activities as opening emergency exit doors or windows, waiting for instructions from train personnel, and/or helping others exit the train. For example, the following was seen as having a passenger safety theme: "'Flames spread from one of the three locomotives,' Dopheide said, and people around him could not find emergency exits" (Kennedy & Harrison, 1993 p. A1). Train personnel safety themes were references to engineer/conductor training, years of experience, age, and/or activities after the crash. A statement such as "We started evacuating people out of the cars that were left on the track" (Warner & Finch, 1993, p. A1) was noted as being train personnel oriented. Train safety themes were references to the probable cause of the crash, meeting industry standards, or to the recent inspections of the train and track. An example would be: "CSX officials said the bridge had undergone a major inspection in February and a visual inspection had been conducted last Sunday and no problems were detected" (Cobb, 1993, p. A1). Finally, the rescue theme was defined, in part, as references to rescue personnel training, availability to victims and/or rescue actions. For example, "Coast Guard Petty Officer Jerry Hoover said his rescue crew was the first to arrive at the scene at 5:15 a.m. -- more than two hours after the crash" (Wolfberg, 1993, p. F4) was coded as having a rescue theme.

The Train Disaster News Story

A total of 117 train disaster news stories were examined (NB: Table 1 totals to more than 117 because 14 stories were double coded for overall story theme). As seen in Table 1, the most common overall category was the passenger story followed by the crash site train story. The story category of "other" also had a high number, but this was due to the mix of stories related to the crash but not to the study.

Table 1
Overall Story Themes

Category	Stories
Passenger Story	31
Crash Site Train	27
Victim Story	14
Other Aid	12
Accident Crash	10
Crash Site Rescue	6
Rescue Worker	6
Op/Ed	3
Previous Crash	2
Other	20

Of the 117 stories reviewed for this study 63 percent were found to contain at least one safety theme paragraph within the larger story. A total of 631 paragraphs were identified as safety theme paragraphs, 32 percent of which were passenger safety themes, 8 percent were train personnel safety, 31 percent were train safety, and 29 percent were rescue safety themes. As in Garner's (1993) study, safety themes rarely appeared alone; more often than not, a story contained a mixture of all the themes. As can be seen in Table 2 below, some safety themes were stronger than others but together they present a view of the safety issues surrounding the crash.

Table 2
Safety Themes Within Overall Story Category

Story Category	TP	Pass	TPer	Train	Rescue
Passenger Story	708	141	5	22	30
Crash Site Train	569	7	10	114	25
Victim Story	362	6	18	0	9
Other Aid	169	0	0	0	1
Accident Crash	357	39	14	30	31
Crash Site Rescue	173	5	6	3	54
Rescue Worker	100	0	1	0	29
OP/ED	33	0	0	0	0
Previous Crash	37	0	0	3	0
Other	241	4	0	22	2

* TP=total story paragraphs; Pass=passenger; TPer=train personnel; Theme numbers refer to paragraphs actually noted as containing a safety theme for that category.

Before discussing how each theme manifested itself within the story categories, a brief example of how all these themes were woven together to create a story is presented. The lead story in the Mobile Press Register serves as a good example of a theme within a theme way of story telling. The article "Most of wreck victims drowned; 126 injured" (September 22, 1993) was double coded as an accident/crash story and passenger story. It retells the story of the crash, beginning with a depiction of the accident as the "worst railroad disaster in Amtrak history." This scene is fortified with descriptions of the train plunging from a bridge just before dawn, of deaths caused by drowning and of normalcy turned to chaos ("We were just sleeping. I heard the sound of the train derailing."). The remainder of the story tells of passenger experiences as the train was crashing and of rescue efforts afterwards.

It is within this retelling of the event, that the passenger safety theme was the strongest. Phrases such as "I looked to my right and saw water flooding into the car. Everbody [sic] panicked." Or, "The power was out and and [sic] we couldn't get the windows open." conveyed not only what was happening but the steps that people tried to take in order to escape the train. The efforts and problems of rescue personnel were also depicted.

> Survivors were removed from the scene by rail, helicopter and boat. (p. A1)
>
> Witnesses said it was about an hour before the coast Guard arrived on the scene. Firefighters, police and other rescue workers arrived shortly thereafter. (p. 13A)

Other stories, such as the one by Kennedy and Harrison (1993), confirmed these themes and added those which focused on the train and train personnel.

> Last week the NTSB blamed poor track maintenance by CSX for an Amtrak crash that killed eight people two years ago in South Carolina. . . . Bussard said the company inspected the tracks visually on Sunday and that Amtrak checked them and the trestle with a laser on Sept. 9. (1993, A1)
>
> There was complete panic until eventually one of the train employees smashed a window for us to escape. (1993, p. A1)

Together these stories and themes confirm our reliance on mass transportation and our need to believe that they are basically safe. Interestingly, several passengers stated that they took the train because they were either afraid of flying or because a train was a safer way to travel. Thus, the stories confirm that accidents do happen and they implicitly or explicitly state that if you are caught in such a situation, whether you survive is a matter of luck or destiny. Emergency exits and rescue personnel will be there to assist you but your survival is in your own hands. As noted by Garner (1993) this is indeed the case but it is not a scenario that the transportation industry wants you to have.

Passenger Safety Theme

The passenger safety theme was the strongest within two overall story categories: accident/crash and passenger stories. The theme was found in the phrases throughout these stories and reveal for the reader the actions the Sunset Limited passengers had to take, or wanted to take, during the event. These phrases conveyed what passengers did (escape); the problems they encountered (fire and water); who they relied on and the various ways they responded to the crash. All of these stories showed that most of the Sunset Limited passengers escaped the wreckage on their own; some through holes in the train, others through the emergency exits.

> When the retired couple awoke in their reclined seats, people were struggling to break out the emergency windows in a partly submerged train car. (Silva, 1993, p. F2)

Heroic acts were also key within the passenger safety theme as the following example illustrates:

> "The people on the lower level were directly submerged immediately," said Tim Palmer, 23, of London. "So we worked very hurriedly to open some of the windows. We had to go under water and get some of the people." (Ray, 1993, p. F2)

Because multiple themes were possible, some passenger safety paragraphs were also noted as train safety or train personnel safety themes. A paragraph with a passenger and train personnel safety theme was found in Ray's (1993) story: "Everybody was screaming and hollering and it was dark," he said, "our sleeping car attendant told us to leave everything and get off the train." References within the stories to train personnel were rare but this is a good example of transportation personnel providing the guidance most passengers seem to expect after a crash.

An example of the passenger and train safety theme can be found in a story paragraph by Pickett (1993):

> She was sitting by the window and I was sitting by the aisle. She hit the seat in front of her and I went sliding down the aisle. . . . For a while we didn't know what to do; frankly, I was talking to people and telling them please, not to panic. (p. A8)

These depictions convey a sense that you have little control over your response to a disaster. Studies by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) (Safety Study, 1985) clearly indicate that this is not the case. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), for example, has insisted that airplane passengers wear seatbelts and be made aware of emergency procedures because survival chances are greatly diminished without such knowledge and behavior. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) in contrast has "established few passenger safety regulations" (Hardy, 1993) and has been criticized by the General Accounting Office (GAO) for providing limited oversight of Amtrak and its passenger safety procedures and equipment. In fact, the authors' investigation of Amtrak's passenger safety position included requests for information from the company. Information was promised, but not provided.

Rescue Safety Theme

The rescue safety theme was also strong, especially in the crash site rescue and rescue worker stories. Most of the rescue images dealt with how long it took the emergency personnel to responded to the crash, the actions they took upon arrival, and other rescue or aid efforts.

> Emergency officials' response to the Amtrak disaster was delayed by confusion and the remote location of the crash. . . . Rescuers had difficulty seeing the wreck through the fog and

> smoke, and were stymied by the lack of roads leading to the site. (Wolfberg, 1993, p. 4F)

These images were complimented by those depicting priests and ministers providing comfort and last rites, as well as fire fighters and medics transporting survivors to area hospitals. Amtrak's role in providing aid and counseling to the survivors and their families, as well as the victims' families, was also noted throughout the news stories. All of these images work to convey the sense that help is available and people will be there to tend to you, once you get off the train.

In addition, the rescue stories and rescue themes noted the value of training and previous disaster experience.

> Just last spring, they held a training session that simulated an air crash in Mobile Bay. . . . "But the drill definitely helped to make this work as well as it did." (Liebrum, 1993, p. A18)

> Sternberg said the hospital regularly practices a disaster drill intended to prepare it for such large scale situations. ("Most of wreck victims drowned," p. A13)

As noted in the introduction, rescue workers were initially hindered by the remote site of the crash. What is interesting to note however, is the fact that despite previous disaster drills, they were also plagued by miscommunications. In fact some rescue personnel were not notified right away of the crash, further delaying the response time. Theme similarity to Garner's (1993) study of the Delta Flight 1141 crash should be noted.

Train Personnel Safety Theme

The train personnel safety theme appeared rarely but when it did it was the strongest in news stories under the categories accident crash and victim story. This theme focused on the years of experience of the engineers and the conductors; the actions they took just prior to and after the train crash.

> He was an engineer with Southern Railroad for 16 years, but not on this route. He was the fireman on this run. (Grelen & Busby, 1993, p. A4)
>
> The assistant conductor then walked through the train trying to calm passengers, . . . "I need absolute quiet," and "We need to work this like a school fire drill," Hammerschmidt said. (Holloway, Busby, Arbanas, & Zurales, 1993, p. A17)

Not all of the train personnel themes were positive or supportive of the crew, or Amtrak. The safety history of previous Amtrak personnel was reviewed and found wanting: "In one widely publicized case involving Amtrak the board ruled that an engineer under the influence of marijuana cause the crash of a train in Maryland in 1987 that caused 16 deaths" (Hardy, 1993, p. F4).

Again, the similarity to Garner's 1993 study should be noted. In both cases, the themes support the idea that the people in charge of the train/plane are reliable, experienced and caring. Yet, it is also here that the search for a probable cause begins. Did the pilot cause the crash of Delta Flight 1141? Did the engineer cause the crash of the Sunset Limited? It soon appeared that human error was the cause but it was the error of the towboat pilot not the train engineer. Questions were then raised about the towboat pilot's training, experience and behavior prior to the crash. The mystery of the crash was established.

Train Safety Theme

The train safety theme was the strongest in crash site train stories. While train safety themes focused on all aspects of the crash (cause, investigation, history), they centered primarily on the train and the barge that hit the bridge. Those themes which focused on the train centered primarily on the safety of the tracks and trestle, who had responsibility for keeping them safe, and when the most recent inspections occurred.

> Amtrak leases the tracks from another rail company, CSX Transportation. Amtrak officials said that CSX is charged with ensuring the safety of the tracks and trestle. (Cobb, 1993, p. A1)
>
> The single-lane span is owned by CSX Transportation Inc., of Jacksonville, Fla. It is one of the busiest bridges in the company's system, carrying 15 to 20 trains a day. It had been inspected as recently as Sunday, and a 123-car CSX freight train with three locomotives had crossed it about an hour before the Amtrak wreck. (Cobb, 1993, p. A2)

Another key theme was the fact that the safety provisions designed to detect track damage did not and could not alert authorities or train personnel that there was something wrong.

> The tracks across the trestle were equipped with sensors to alert train conductors of problems ahead. But such a system would not activate if the blow by the barge against the trestle only bent the tracks and did not break them, officials said. Investigators described the damage to the tracks as a displacement, not a break. (Malnic, 1993, p. A12)

In this disaster the safety of the train, its track and trestle were influenced by the presence of Warrior and Gulf barges in the Bayou Canot. The barges supposedly hit the Bayou Canot bridge and this discussion framed much of the dialog within the train safety theme and further fueled the mystery of the crash.

> "We have physical evidence that a pier of this bridge was struck. The physical evidence seems to indicate the scrape marks on the bridge and the scrape marks on the barge match up." . . . The bridge, built in 1909, spans the Big Bayou Canot, a sector of the watery labyrinth of the Mobile river delta that is supposed to be off-limits to barges. ("Barge may have hit bridge before rail disaster," 1993, p. A1)

Within this discussion were reassuring statements that the pilot of the towboat was licensed and trained to operate in the area's waterways. At the same time questions were raised as to the pilot's behavior prior to and just after the crash.

> Radio transmissions between the Mauvilla and the Coast Guard show that the towboat called for help at 3:06 a.m., which would have been about 20 minutes after the bridge over Bayou Canot collapsed. . . . "He never said he hit the bridge," said Coast Guard Capt. Michael Perkins of the radio caller. . . . asked . . . if he was in danger. The towboat caller answered, "no." . . . "It's real bad here," the caller said. "There's a train that ran off into the water. There's a lot of people that need help, and there's a fire . . . I'm going to try to help some of them I'll get back to you." (Cobb, 1993, p. A1)

As in the study by Garner (1993) the Amtrak disaster coverage established a mystery, replete with heroes and possible villains.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, the authors hoped to assess if Garner's (1993) safety themes could be found in train disaster news coverage and second to discover any differences or similarities in newspaper coverage of airplane and train disasters. The study reveals that mass transportation disaster news stories contain more than inaccuracies and myths. While modes of mass transportation may differ, the type of news coverage and safety themes found across disasters did not. Both studies found that news stories contain images of passenger behavior during and after a crash; images of train/plane personnel and rescue worker responses and training; as well as images of train/plane safety. Differences in thematic content stemmed from the disaster itself and the events surrounding the disaster, not from the coverage.

In addition, the study illustrates that these themes are embedded within an overall story framework similar to that outlined by such scholars as Vincent, et al. (1989) and Berkowitz (1992). Images of normalcy tragically disrupted by the crash abound as do images of disaster relief personnel and train officials working to restore order. The mystery of the event is established and repeatedly presented along with images of possible causes and past villains. Why were the barges in the bayou? Why won't the towboat pilot talk to the NTSB and the FBI? Why did the rescue personnel take so long to respond?

By the fifth day of coverage it is clear that order has been restored, life is beginning to return to normal for passengers, their families and Amtrak. Heroes are still being recognized and the NTSB states it is getting closer to establishing what happened and why. Passenger train transportation has begun again, and passengers are still riding. The disaster, presented as a breakdown in our social order, also conveys a clear sense that there are rescue workers there to restore order in the short-term and that there are train, FBI, and NTSB officials there to restore it for the long-term. As in the airplane disaster coverage, issues of morality are implied. Previous crashes, we are told, have been caused by human error, usually that of the engineer. Here, too, is an implication of human error, but this time that of the towboat pilot. We are assured however, that whatever or whomever caused the crash will be found and punished.

Finally, it is within this framework that we also learn what to expect when a train crashes and what we might have to do if ever we find ourselves in a similar position. We must rely on our own resources and those of our fellow passengers. Our safety is not ensured by our choice of transportation, but challenged by fate.

While it is clear from this study that transportation disaster news stories do contain safety information that readers can draw upon to shape their own disaster knowledge, preparation, and response, several questions remain. First, do the findings here hold up across all transportation disasters? It would appear so based on this and previous research by the authors and others. However, more studies need to be conducted. In addition, studies which focus on natural disaster news coverage need to be conducted to determine if similar safety themes appear there. More work also needs to be done to determine what readers are learning about disaster behavior from these news stories. It is clear that they are relying on the mass media for this information but it is not clear what they are learning. Finally, disaster mitigation officials need to pay more attention to news story content and news work if they are going to rely on the mass media to educate the public about appropriate disaster responses.

Note

[1] Account compiled from various reports in Mobile Press Register, September 22, 1993 through September 26, 1993.

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Toward a working theory of representations of tolerance and intolerance in the press

by

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News provides a common framework of interpretation for synthesizing, categorizing and understanding events, people, and concepts. A journalist's representation of tolerance and intolerance may depend on language choices, stylistic techniques, and formats that "symbolize, authorize, stage, and convince" (Erikson, Baranel & Chan, 1991; p. 11) their readers of how the concepts are to be understood. To the extent these choices and formats are repeated nationwide by other newspapers, a representation of tolerance and intolerance emerges. This paper will form a composite portrait of how newspapers represent tolerance and intolerance by using particular news formats and conventions to clarify the concepts. In this paper, I analyze different models that explain how newspapers represent concepts of tolerance and intolerance, differences in coverage by subgroup, and structural influences on the amount of coverage.

Background. Nearly forty years have passed since McCarthy's Red Scare prompted research on individuals' tolerance (Stouffer, 1955). As a psychological concept, tolerance of those with whom we disagree is an affirmative value endemic to a pluralistic democratic society. Individuals' support for others' civil liberties like free speech, free assembly and a free press creates a democratic society (Prothro & Grigg, 1960). Its dark underbelly, intolerance, is defined by some as the controversial dissension among individuals with disagreeable views. Intolerance endangers "community" by creating tensions, and it may precipitate violence (Hunter, 1993). However, tolerance and intolerance may not be opposite ends of a single dimension, despite the obvious connotation. For example, publishers of the *Intelligence Report* at the Southern Poverty Law Center, imply that the following incidents are evidence of intolerance when directed at African-Americans, Jewish-Americans, or gay and lesbians: murders, bombings, arson, assaults, cross-burnings, possession of weapons in public places, threats, vandalism, clashes, harassment, intimidation, marches, rallies, demonstrations, leafleting, and protests (*Intelligence Report*, December 1993). Accordingly, intolerant individuals may be better identified by their associations with threatening incidents than by their public opinions of minorities. Possibly, what notions individuals recognize as prototypical intolerance and its related issues may depend on how the media characterize the term.

Better understood among researchers than intolerance is tolerance and its correlates. But evidence regarding how the press covers issues of tolerance and intolerance and why the press includes certain events and not others is lacking. Indeed, in spite of Stouffer's implicit concern about the press's complicity in McCarthy's witch hunts (pp. 225), few studies have described and analyzed news reports on intolerance.

Questions about the media's coverage of tolerance and intolerance are gaining attention. Recently, media critics have pondered the issues surrounding coverage of a specific example of intolerance like "The Culture War" which has featured conflicts over free expression in society and community standards (see *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August, 1993). As another example, the coverage of the Rodney King incident in Los Angeles circulated the imagery of racial intolerance by virtue of a videotape witness. Why did the Rodney King archetype of racism emerge as an egregious incident when other people suggest that such incidents may be commonplace in Los Angeles? Why did we not hear about the other incidents? Such questions steer investigators toward possible explanations for the coverage of intolerance.

Some critics have raised related issues as concerns about media ethics. Relevant ethical issues have included such stylistic questions as: should journalists abandon reporting facts to endorse democratic ideals or to interpret trends (see Stouffer, 1955; Hunter, 1993); and, what are the ideal methods of covering intolerance? But such "ethical" debates seem to identify the practices of the Religious Right versus those of the New Left–a seemingly interminable and unsolvable argument that at least captures the perceptual biases of those sources (e.g., McGowan, 1993)–more often than it does identify the key substantive issues about journalistic practices. Important questions lay beneath the inflamed rhetoric: have newspapers covered substantive incidents of intolerance? Are all forms of intolerance covered similarly, or does coverage vary by the target group? What reasons explain stories on tolerance and intolerance?

This study will "get underneath the discourse" (Hunter, 1993) to analyze the variation in newspaper content in a systematic way. My consideration of viable explanations for the creation of such stories recognizes factors that influence the news. For example, theorists have identified journalists' attitudes and beliefs as possible influences on media content (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Shoemaker, 1987; Tuchman, 1978; van Dijk, 1988). In addition, the newspaper industry's structure may be highly relevant to content. Representations of intolerance may depend on resources available to the newspaper, given market conditions. For example, news outlets represented control, law, and justice differently because of different market criteria (Erikson et al., p.335). More pertinent to this subject, the diversity of the newsroom may also influence content.

While this investigation presents neither a finite set of possible decisions about such coverage nor a validation of certain criteria, it identifies a testable set of probable judgments on its nature. A given decision on coverage cannot be assumed to have been a unilateral judgment made by either reporters or editors. Such decisions regarding the nature of such coverage are based on information gathered from the literatures on tolerance, theories of news content, and ethical concerns of practitioners themselves. Accordingly, this approach constitutes an investigation into what McQuail has defined as a "working theory" of the press,

> "...since it offers guidelines on the purposes of media work, how things ought to be done in line with the more abstract principles of social theory and also on how certain ends *can* be achieved. Some of the ideas involved are matters of technique, some are enshrined in traditions, professional practices, norms of behavior, rules of thumb, which guide the work of media production and give it consistency over time." (McQuail, 1983/1988; pp. 4-5)

Research Question. Articles that report intolerance may be of two forms. An article may describe members of target groups who are perceived to be nonconformist. Or such reports may recount how members of social groups have been threatened, harassed, discriminated against, or attacked by other individual(s). Whether the articles are descriptive, argumentative, or analytic, certain judgmental regularities are likely to underlie such reports. Story elements may be based on categories of news formats such as contexts, quotations, number of incidents, etc. For this study, journalistic decisions have been grouped into six models which use story elements as the units of analyses: *Intolerance as a marginalized subject, Worthy and unworthy victims of intolerance, the Newsworthy perpetrator of intolerance, Sensational intolerance, Educating democratic principles,* and *Advocates for a cause versus press complicity in McCarthyism.* An additional four models use data aggregated by newspaper to analyze equally plausible factors related to the newspaper industry: *Newsroom diversity, Type of media financing, Ownership structure, and Market demographics/Good business.* Which of these models best represent coverage of tolerance and intolerance?

Intolerance as a marginalized subject. Newspapers' current standards of newsworthiness may work against covering intolerance as a concern for the mainstream community. A newspaper's agenda is set because a newspaper editor considers certain stories to be more important than others. Deciding "what's news" has been a topic of research for decades (e.g., Galtung & Ruge, 1973; Gans, 1979). Studies have shown that coverage of deviant groups tends to describe people who have "...gathered at inappropriate places at inappropriate times for inappropriate purposes (Molotch & Lester, 1975) as threat to social stability" (Tuchman, 1978; p. 184). To the extent that such a group member's behavior is judged by editors to be typical or unless a perpetrator is seen as particularly newsworthy for an egregious quality, this decisional model places reports of intolerance less prominently in the newspaper.

H1: Articles which report victims of intolerance will tend to be less prominent in the newspapers than will articles which report on the general topic of tolerance or intolerance.

Worthy and unworthy victims of intolerance. Coverage of intolerance may occur because reporters consider a particular social group as unworthy of controversial or tragic treatment (based on Herman & Chomsky, 1988). This implies that journalists' beliefs and emotions about particular social groups may play a role in assignment editing and the coverage of intolerance. Socialization processes of journalists have been research concerns in theories of news content (e.g., Shoemaker, 1987; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; van Dijk, 1988). To the extent that journalists' opinions are similar to the mass public in studies of aggregate public opinions, variance in the public's opinions about tolerating certain social groups more than others are relevant. Tolerance has fluctuated greatly over time, but intolerance parallels the emergence of a threatening group (Mueller, 1988).

Particular *social groups* were of special theoretical interest. The political tolerance literature emphasizes person's support for the civil liberties of nonconformist groups. Stouffer (1955) focused on people's support for the liberties of communists and atheists. Later investigators analyzed public support for the civil liberties of socialists, homosexuals, racists, militarists, atheists, and/or communists.[1] To mesh these traditional groups with contemporary targets (see *Intelligence Report*, 1993), this paper focuses on intolerance and tolerance toward *racial* groups, *homosexuals, gays and/or lesbians*, and *religious groups*. Whether newspaper coverage serves as a bellwether for new targets or as an indicator of a pervasively distributed intolerant system in society, the worthy and unworthy victims of intolerance hypothesis thus predicts:

H2: Reports on tolerance and intolerance will tend to emphasize a particular kind of victim (as indicated by his or her social group) more often than a member of another social group.

The Newsworthy perpetrator. Based somewhat loosely on The Worthy/Unworthy Victim Model is an alternate model focusing on a newsworthy perpetrator. Coverage of intolerance may result because of particularly disreputable perpetrators like skinheads, bigots, etc. As a by-product of coverage due to social undesirables, the Newsworthy Perpetrator model reinforces journalists' and audiences' impressions that intolerance occurs in extreme circumstances involving another nonconformist group. The Newsworthy Perpetrator model predicts:

H3: Among the possible threats cited in an article on a victim of intolerance, a particular kind of perpetrator will be mentioned more often than other types of perpetrators.

Sensational intolerance. The tragic consequences of intolerance may attract media attention because of negative news values. Van Dijk (1987) discussed how coverage of racial minorities may be largely negative because of occasional demonstrations or acts of resistance, which appeal to the news values of negativism, deviance, and violence. These news values may also play a role in the coverage of intolerance whether by evidence or tone. No less sensational may be counter-protests that raise the ire of onlookers, witnesses to the irrational threats or actions of others, surprise perpetrators like elites who come-out as extremists, or irrefutable evidence like a videotape (e.g., the Rodney King incident).[2] Accordingly, the sensational intolerance model predicts:

H4: Sensational evidence will tend to be positively associated with reports on intolerance or tolerance.

Educating democratic principles. Newspapers may educate their audience by including articles and editorials on intolerance that cite civil rights or the First Amendment. This hypothesis builds on evidence in political psychology and media studies. Recently, researchers have included direct measures of the principles individuals employ in their reasoning to arrive at a tolerant decision (McLeod, Steele, Chi & Huang, 1991). Mentioning such legal devices in articles about tolerance or intolerance strives to reinforce the constitutional rights of perceived nonconformists. However, also possible are reports that mention these constitutional rights in support of intolerance (e.g., freedom from association). Accordingly, the Educating Democratic Principles Model predicts contrasting hypotheses:

H5a: There will be a positive relationship between articles on tolerance or intolerance and the mention of civil rights or the First Amendment. (The pro-tolerance hypothesis.)

H5b: There will be a positive relationship between articles which mention tolerance or intolerance and the backlash against tolerance (e.g., stories on the so-called "politically correct" culture); this correlation will be stronger than the association with victims of intolerance. (The intolerance backlash hypothesis.)

Advocates for a cause Vs. Press Complicity in McCarthyism. Studies have shown relatively greater tolerance among community leaders than among the mass public (e.g., Nunn, Crockett, & Williams, 1978; McClosky & Brill, 1983; Stouffer, 1955). Correspondingly, newspapers may report on tolerance or intolerance because community leaders have made the topic an issue as advocates for the cause. Therefore, if certain leaders of organizations tend to be associated with articles about tolerance or intolerance, the Advocates for a Cause model would find support.

An alternate model is based on the writings of critical scholars who assert that government officials are likely to be quoted often, instead of other sources. This model also follows-up on Samuel Stouffer's concern that McCarthyism might be replicated by allowing a public official to offend, put-to-task, or witch-hunt a particular nonconformist group. Stouffer's concern may gain considerable credence because of an official-as-source journalistic norm. Such news conventions as the press conference, the beat system, quotations from government officials, off-the-record or background information and the phenomenon of news leaks, serve the interests of the reporter, the newspaper, and the government--by fostering a "symbiotic" government-press relationship (Sigal, 1973; Gans, 1980; Bennett, 1980, p. 320). In other words, newspapers may report on tolerance or intolerance because politicians have made the topic an issue and the organizational practices of *journalists reinforce* the increased likelihood of symbiosis. The Press Complicity in McCarthyism model thus predicts:

H6a: Governmental officials will be quoted more often than other types of sources in articles that mention tolerance or intolerance.

Alternatively, the Advocates for a cause model predicts:

H6b: Community leaders will be quoted more often than other types of sources in articles that mention tolerance or intolerance.

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE.

Another broad factor that may influence news portrayals of intolerance is based on the structure of the American media. This study will examine the influence of four structural factors: employment statistics on newsroom diversity, financing, group-ownership economics, and market demographics.

Diversity of newsrooms. Newsroom diversity is a concern of industry leaders, according to trade publications. Newspapers have attempted to hire minorities and women to cover all parts of a community. To the extent that minorities' sensitivities influence reports, diversity of newsrooms should be positively related to reports on intolerance.

H8: There will be a positive relationship between the percentage of minorities employed by the newspaper and the number of words on tolerance and intolerance.

Type of Media Financing. *Type* of media financing is another such factor, as Shoemaker theorizes (1987). Categories of media financing include publicly-traded independent, publicly-traded group-owned, private group-owned, or independently-owned. Research shows some impact of financing on newspaper content. News about the 1988 presidential election was influenced by financing such that the publicly-held *Washington Post* provided more objective news than the privately-held *Washington Times* (Kenney & Simpson, 1993). The *Washington Times*, owned by the Unification Church, admits to a conservative ideological stance in its content (Kenney et al., p. 346). Publicly-held newspapers are presumably more objective because they are accountable to stockholders. A hypothesis is asserted to test the notion that privately-held newspapers may be more conservative than those that are publicly-held.

H9: Publicly-held newspapers will publish more words on in/tolerance than will privately-held newspapers.

Ownership structure. Studies also suggest that *group-ownership* may affect coverage such that group-owned newspapers may provide less local news than do independently-owned papers (Olien, Tichenor & Donahue, 1988; Wilhoit & Drew, p. 29). Group ownership refers to a company that owns two or more daily newspapers in different cities (*Editor & Publisher, The International Year Book, 1993*). Studies have found relative homogeneity in group-owned newspapers' presidential endorsements (Wackman, Gillmore, Gaziano, & Dennis, 1975; Gaziano, 1989), consonance of "play" on the Gary Hart story within the Knight-Ridder chain (Glasser, Allen, & Blanks, 1989), and a high degree of uniformity in editorials on controversial political issues (Akhava-Majid, Rife & Gopinath, 1989). Together, the evidence suggests that ownership may influence the coverage of intolerance.

H10: Group-owned newspapers will publish less words on in/tolerance than will independently-owned newspapers.

Market Demographics/Good business. Newspapers might publish articles on in/tolerance if it serves their bottom lines. Three factors seem likely related to such coverage: circulation size, median household income, and market penetration. Newspapers' revenues based on circulation and amount of advertising presume individuals' disposable income. Although income may not be related to individuals' tolerance (McLeod, Steele, Chi & Huang, 1991), it is surely related to a newspaper's concern for profits. To the extent that newspapers cover topics that interest desirable readers (i.e., *those with higher incomes to attract advertisers), income may influence coverage of* tolerance and intolerance.

H11: There will be positive relationships between circulation and number of stories on in/tolerance, between population and number of stories, and between median income and number of stories on in/tolerance.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling. The sample was chosen by randomly selecting 30 days from the frame of 365 days in 1993. This sampling procedure assures the independence of observations (i.e., articles) necessary to calculate statistical significance. In addition, this sampling technique assures the "equivalence" of articles such that coverage that builds on earlier reports, as a form of inter-media dependence, would not compromise the sample.

Stories were selected on-line from the major newspaper and wire stories[3] files of LEXIS/NEXIS®.[4] Using LEXIS/NEXIS® as the sampling source rendered two benefits. First, an adequate representation of days-of-the-week and months-of-the-year (see Tables 1 & 2) was obtained efficiently. Second, the articles selected satisfied keyword conditions, which yielded a selection of newspapers that published reports, thus enabling analyses at the level of the newspaper (Table 3). Newspapers' ownership information was acquired from the *1993 Editor and Publisher* and *SRDS's Newspaper Rates and Data* (July, 1993) published by Standard Rate and Data. Additional information on media financing was based on corporate listing and stock exchange information provided by *Standard & Poor's Register of Corporations, Directors and Executives, 1994.* Percentage of minority journalists at the United States' 50 largest newspapers in 1993 was acquired from *American Journalism Review*, November, 1993 (Shepard, 1993). Keyword searches yielded 90 stories on racial tolerance, 56 stories on homosexuals, and 74 stories on religious tolerance or intolerance. As both search terms of "tolerance" and "intolerance" were used in this analysis, I shall refer to the subject matter as in/tolerance in this paper for simplicity.

Coding. Each article was coded for several objective and subjective measures. Objective measures included date, day of week, total number of words, newspaper, placement in the paper, type of article, etc. Subjective measures included likert scales that assessed the coder's evaluation of the extent to which each article was objective, emotional, or factual.[5] Likert scales were based on ten-points, where one means WEAK and ten means STRONG. The same scale was used for lead sentences, first paragraphs, and headlines. In addition, coders were asked to assess the extent to which the article's tone was fearful or rational and fact-based. A high-score indicates a fearful or lack of factual tone. Coders also indicated whether the article mentioned civil rights, protest or march, First Amendment, AIDS-related violence, fear and hatred by the perpetrator, AIDS-related fear linked to religion, and anti-gay "bashing." Finally, the coders counted the total number of individuals quoted by category of affiliation. Scott's pi for these items averaged .823 (Appendix A).

Dependent Measures. Analyses of articles used five variables to represent journalistic decisions: (1) *placement* (hard news, section A; feature; etc.), (2) *context* of the issue (crime-related, election-related, local feature, regarding politically correct, movie/book review, etc.), (3) article *type* (editorial, locally originated story, wire service, columnist, letters to the editor, etc.), (4) geographic *location* of the incident (local to paper, regional to paper, national, international), (5) *number of words*. When necessary, each category was recoded to indicate a broader category.

Independent Measures: Explanatory Models. Intolerance as a marginalized subject. Media coverage was categorized by the frequency with which violence occurred, by the frequency of a story that mentions victims, and by the frequency with which a story recounts incidents that occurred at another time. In addition, the placement of articles was examined.

Worthy and Unworthy victims of intolerance. Two operational definitions of "emphasis" were tested: mean words for stories primarily about in/tolerance (versus mean words for all stories that mentioned the keywords) and for story topic (subgroup), number of victims, presence of violence, and number of stories conveying violence.

Sensational intolerance. The model examined three sets of factors that may create sensational content about the three target groups: evidence, tone, and style. To discern more precise patterns, a series of factor analyses were performed. First, the six items regarding ***evidence*** of violence, AIDS-related violence, fear and hatred as cited by perpetrator, and AIDS-related fear including a religious link to AIDS were reduced by a principle components factor analysis to three orthogonal factors: Perpetrator, Religion, and AIDS violence (Table 4). Second, two items assessed the coder's evaluation of the coverage ***tone*** as fearful or factual using a ten-point item ranging from "weak" to "strong."[6] A third factor assessed the ***style*** of the overall story, lead sentence, first paragraph and headline for opinion, emotion, and fact. Again, a principle components factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed to reduce data. This analysis produced three factors: Frame, Summary, and Emotion (Table 5).

Educating democratic principles. Two hypotheses were proposed as viable explanations for the coverage of in/tolerance. For the "pro-tolerance" hypothesis, data on democratic principles were reduced by factor analysis, producing two orthogonal factors: Rights and Protest (Table 6). The second explanation, the intolerance-backlash hypothesis, was operationalized as whether the words "politically correct" occurred in a story.

Advocates for a cause versus Press complicity in McCarthyism. Two explanations were contrasted for their ability to account for the greater number of quotations. To reduce data, two factor analyses were performed. First, a factor analysis of unofficial sources (e.g., gay or lesbian organizational leaders, educators, civil rights leaders, etc.) produced two orthogonal factors: Targets and Open-minds (Table 7). Second, another factor analysis of official sources (e.g., police, nationally-elected officials, etc.) produced two factors which dealt with proximity to the reader: Nearness and Far Away (Table 8).

Data aggregated by newspaper. These data were also aggregated by newspaper, rendering averages and summations. Data analyses focused on two dependent variables: (1) *average number of words*, and (2) *average number of stories per subgroup*. Several independent variables characterized the structure of the newspaper industry. These variables include newspaper circulation figures, whether the newspaper was privately-held (0) or publicly financed (1), whether the newspaper was group-owned (1) or not (0), number of households in the metropolitan statistical area, median buying income, area hispanic population, area black population, and percentage of minorities in the newsroom.

Several computations adjusted the data for comparability. For example, the total black and hispanic populations were expressed as a percentage of total population. In addition, a variable was created to express circulation in proportion to total population, yielding a statistic of a newspaper's "penetration" into a market. The higher a newspaper's penetration into a market, the greater its readership and potential advertising revenue.

RESULTS: CONTENT ANALYSIS

Intolerance as a marginalized subject. Of 160 articles on in/tolerance, only 11 articles mentioned victimization due to violence. Fifty-six articles mentioned violence, and 88 articles conveyed stories about incidents that occurred at another time.

Hypothesis one asserted a relationship between articles that report victims of intolerance and placement in the newspaper. Specifically, it was predicted that victims of intolerance would be marginalized subjects such that reports would tend not to appear in the first section. Three variables were examined as indicators of victims of intolerance: number of victims, presence of violence, number of violent stories conveyed in a report. Overall, no differences were found in the placement of stories reporting violence, victimization, or many violent stories.

While each kind of victim (due to race, sexual orientation, or religion) was just as likely to be read in the hard news sections as in other sections of the newspapers,[7] the kind of target and context made a difference in news placement. Further analyses of placement by article type (recoded for local and non-local origination) controlling for target, obtained marginally significant results (X=3.31, df=1, p=.068). Reports on racial in/tolerance were usually local stories.[8] In addition, stories reporting victimization were more likely to be contextualized as issues related to crime, an event, or legality than as appropriate for features and other stories (Table 9a). However, some differences emerged by target group. Table 9b shows that stories about racial victims were more likely to be contextualized as crime, event, or legal issues than other types of stories; and, this finding did not appear for gay/lesbians or religious targets.

Worthy and Unworthy victims of intolerance. The second hypothesis asserts that a given social group will receive more emphasis than another group. Two operational definitions of "emphasis" were tested with few significant results. First, articles primarily about tolerance or intolerance had no more words on average than did articles in which the keywords were only mentioned (e.g., a book review that mentions in/tolerance). Second, no significant differences in mean number of words occurred in tests of story topic (homosexuals, racial, religious targets), number of victims, the presence of violence, and the number of stories conveying violence. Subgroup analyses provided better information.

Article type and context of incident, as two explanations for these null results, were investigated for their relationships to number of words, by target group. The mean number of words on in/tolerance was significantly higher for local articles (editorials, local reports, columnists, and letters to the editor) (962.8) compared to non-local articles (wire service, national columnist, abstracts, and others) (630.9). Of local stories, articles about homosexuals had more words on average (1094, n=34) but racial in/tolerance commanded the most stories (950.8, n=41). Religious in/tolerance received the highest mean words of non-local stories. Finally, mean words were significantly higher for non-criminal or legal contexts compared to criminal, legal, and event-related contexts (Table 9b). In/tolerance of homosexuality had its highest mean in non-criminal contexts. Non-criminal contexts include elections, local features, mentions of politically correct, movie and book reviews, etc. Thus, although no significant differences appeared among target groups in overall coverage, differences appeared for the article type and context in which in/tolerance was covered for particular social groups.

The Newsworthy perpetrator model. The third hypothesis predicted that coverage may emphasize a perpetrator such as a skinhead, bigot, etc. No differences emerged among all threats for number of words, but significant differences emerged when each was reclassified as a "personal" or "societal" threat. Societal threats (ignorance, society, homophobia) were significantly related to number of words ($t=-2.68$, $p<.05$).[9] The individual means by target (homosexual, racial, religious) indicate more personal and societal threats reported for racial issues than for other targets. Accordingly, the Newsworthy perpetrator model is moderately supported.

Sensational Intolerance model. For this study, sensational content is indicated by content that strategically uses kinds of evidence, certain news styles, and a particular tone. Overall, the best predictors of words were Perpetrator ($\beta=.241$, $p<.01$), Religious Link to AIDS ($\beta=.135$, $p<.05$), headlines and overall story characterized as opinion ($\beta=.233$, $p<.05$), and Emotional content ($\beta=.172$, $p<.05$)($n=207$). But differences emerged when considering each target of in/tolerance.

A multiple regression equation predicting number of words using the six factors and two variables (fearful and factual tone) was performed for each subgroup target. Results mostly indicated different predictors of content by target (Table 10). Articles about racial targets were positively linked to the Perpetrator factor, and negatively predicted by AIDS-violence and by Religious link to AIDS. Content about homosexual targets was best estimated by emotional style, non-factual tone, headlines and overall stories characterized as opinionated, and strong positive relationships with the AIDS-Religious link and the Perpetrator factors. Finally, reports about religious in/tolerance were best characterized by a strong negative relationship with AIDS-Religious link, and opinionated headlines and stories. Thus, taking into account each subgroup target, the Sensational Intolerance model is given clear support. Where evidence played a role in coverage of racial and religious issues, news style characterized in/tolerance towards homosexuals.

Educating democratic principles. As expected, there is some support for the first hypothesis that predicted a relationship between democratic principles and tolerance. Rights, more strongly than protest, is positively related to number of words (Table 11). A subgroup analysis, however, reveals that the strength of the "rights" correlation can be accounted for by the racial subgroup ($r=.21$, $p=.02$, one-tail). Neither the gay/lesbian ($r=.20$, $p=.065$) nor the religious subgroups ($r=.17$, $p=.06$) match its statistical significance or its strength. The second hypothesis which predicted intolerance backlash was not supported.[10]

Advocates for a cause Versus press complicity in McCarthyism. Over all content, the positive associations between number of words and the quotation factors reach significance only once, lending some support for the Advocates for a cause (Table 12). However, the relationship between quotations of community leaders (i.e., "Open Mind") and total words holds only for the religious subgroup (Table 10). Where only marginal support was found for official sources for the gay and lesbian subgroup, no relationships held for the racial subgroup.

RESULTS: NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE

Diversity of newsrooms. Contrary to expectations, the relationship between percentage of minorities in the newsroom and average number of words on in/tolerance is strongly negative (r=-.50, p=.008, n=22).[11] Examining average number of reports by subgroup, the influence of newsroom diversity changes its direction. Where newsroom diversity is marginally related to average stories about homosexual in/tolerance (r=.32, p=.067, n=22), evidence suggests diversity may be negatively related to average stories on race such that a more diverse newsroom tends to be associated with less number of stories. However, this evidence is only marginally significant (r=-.29, p=.09, n=22). Diversity is not related to average stories on religious tolerance.

Type of Media Financing. Whether a newspaper is privately- or publicly-held is not a factor in reporting on in/tolerance. Type of financing does not correspond to average words written about in/tolerance.

Ownership Structure. Group ownership is not a factor in coverage of in/tolerance.[12] Ownership is also not related to average words on in/tolerance per newspaper (r=-.20, p=.16, n=24), nor is ownership related to average number of stories per subgroup target.

Market Demographics/Good Business. Neither actual newspaper circulation nor metropolitan area population relate to different measures of target group coverage. However, the greater a newspaper's penetration into its market, the greater the number of stories, on average, on racial in/tolerance (r=.37, p=.037, n=24). For religious targets, greater distribution corresponds with less stories on average (r=-.49, p=.006, n=24).[13] Finally, the higher the median income in a given market, the greater the number of stories on average about religious in/tolerance (r=.38, p=.031, n=24). Median income is not related to coverage of other groups.

CONCLUSION

This composite portrayal of how newspapers represent the concept of intolerance and tolerance adds credence to "working theories" of the press. By examining the articles themselves and in conjunction with newspaper industry data, several models asserting judgmental and structural regularities were investigated. My results may not hearten civil libertarians.

Structural influences on coverage. Most importantly, this study found that a greater percentage of minorities in the newsrooms does ***not*** necessarily correspond with greater coverage on in/tolerance. Three explanations seem possible. First, minorities in the newsroom probably have not risen to positions of influence where they would have powerful impact on content. Less opportunities for the promotion of minorities may have curtailed their participation in decisions, perhaps based on prejudice (see Stewart, 1990). Part of Stewart's model of women's participation in elite roles in organizations includes public policy enactments due to the political pressure of the women's movement (p. 206). Adapting her approach, newspapers may change as African-Americans', Asian-Americans', Hispanic-Americans' and Gay/Lesbian-Americans' civil rights movements actually change individuals' lifestyles and as the relevant issues become better articulated. Second, minorities may defer their status in order to not be "ghettoized" as the reporter assigned to the issue (e.g., the gay and lesbian issues reporter). In order to run with the pack, such reporters may minimize their identity to get further ahead. Third, all individuals in the newsroom may be influenced to conform by a socialization pressure that reinforces perceived professional roles and duties. Clearly, statuses of minorities in the workplace need further investigation.

Judgmental influences on coverage. These data suggest a problem with journalistic conventions that discourage judicious coverage perhaps because journalists may not have carved the news pegs on which to neatly hang the story. In lieu of these new conventions, content tends to satisfy the criteria of "Intolerance as a marginalized subject" and "Sensational Intolerance." However, this explanation is hardly airtight, given the marginal or mixed support found for market influences on content, and for the evidence supporting traditional avenues of reporting (i.e., "The Newsworthy Perpetrator," "Educating Democratic Principles," "Advocates for a cause Versus Press complicity in McCarthyism" models).

Summary. Together, the evidence suggests two major newspaper representations of in/tolerance. The first route is the official route. When reporters have accepted a social group as prototypical of in/tolerance, such as most racial issues in these data, coverage tends to appear in predictable locations in the newspaper with appropriate designations like "crime," "illegalities," and event- or incident-related contexts. Reporters also tend to include quotations from community advocates, rather than rely on official interpretations. The second route is unofficial and, perhaps, subversive of the official route. Representation of homosexual in/tolerance illustrates this prototypical route. It is unofficial because such content appears in newspaper contexts as election stories, features, and book and movie reviews. It is subversive because it suggests that unofficial *sources* are attempting to gain media attention through uncommon channels like the arts, theater, and literature. By depending on reviewers, advocates for homosexual tolerance appear to have less chance for coverage, but perhaps more space. In/tolerance toward homosexuals also may be associated with officials-as-sources, suggesting that journalists may be complicit with the "authority" opinion.

My evidence clearly does not support an optimistic conclusion. This study suggests that the ways tolerance and intolerance are represented in the newspaper change, depending on structural factors. Newspapers in wealthy areas are likely to provide more coverage on religious in/tolerance. Newspapers with greater distribution or penetration into their markets are more likely to cover issues of racial in/tolerance. But other factors, like newsroom diversity, are likely to depress coverage on tolerance toward nonconformist groups.

Endnotes

1. See Nunn, Crockett & Williams (1978); McClosky & Brill (1983); Sniderman, Tetlock, Brody, Green & Hout (1989).

2. Based on a discussion with Robert Craig, Associate Professor of Graphic Design, S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University (November 10, 1994).

3. Stories were obtained from the following wire services: the Associated Press (AP), United Press International (UPI), Agence France Presse (AFP), Reuters, TASS, the Abortion Wire Service, and CKT.

4. The specific phrases to be searched were: rac! and w/in 10 toler! or intoler!, homo! or gay or lesb! and w/in 10 toler! or intoler!, and relig! and w/in 10 toler! or intoler!.

5. The coding framework was influenced by Hynds (1990) and Krieghbaum (1956).

6. Cronbach's alpha was .665.

7. Non-significant results are discussed but not displayed.

8. No differences were obtained for stories about gay/lesbians or religious tolerance and intolerance. Additional analyses of the issue's context (crime, election or event-related, movie or book review, etc.) by article type (editorial, local origination, wire service, columnists, letters to the editor) recoded by local and non-local status, while controlling for topic (gay/lesbian, racial, or religious targets) revealed no significant differences.

9. The sample size included stories which mentioned tolerance or intolerance.

10. Pearson's correlation coefficient between violence and number of words was nonsignificant (-.08, p=.111, n=219). Politically correct context and number of words were also unrelated (-.03, p=.309, n=219).

11. Lending support to this finding, newsroom diversity does not relate to total number of stories, and it is in the negative direction (-.04, n.s.).

12. Publicly-financed newspapers tend to be group-owned (r=.43, p=.01, n=24).

13. Tolerance of homosexuals was not related to this measure.

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Table 1: Sample Distribution by Week

Day	Number of stories	Percentage of total
Sunday	79	35.9
Monday	17	7.7
Tuesday	30	13.6
Wednesday	18	8.2
Thursday	14	6.4
Friday	24	10.9
Saturday	38	17.3
TOTAL	220	100.0

Table 2: Sample distribution by month

Month	Number of stories	Percentage of total
January	50	22.7
February	0	0.0
March	22	10.0
April	34	15.4
May	14	6.3
June	12	5.5
July	20	9.0
August	08	3.6
September	15	6.8
October	31	14.0
November	04	1.8
December	10	4.5
	220	100.0*

* < 100% due to rounding error

Table 3: Newspapers by Mean and Frequency of In/Tolerance Targets

Newspaper Name	Overall Mean	Number of Stories		
		Gay/Lesb.	Race	Religious
Arizona Republic	1426.5	2	0	0
Atlanta Journal and Constitution	563.88	1	2	6
The Boston Globe	1125.22	3	4	2
Chicago Tribune	1261.54	0	6	5
The Cleveland Plain Dealer	695.50	0	4	2
Dallas Morning News	1001.44	2	4	3
The Houston Chronicle	1235.60	3	4	3
Los Angeles Times	742.047	7	9	5
Miami Herald Abstracts	32.00	1	0	0
Minneapolis Star Tribune	1233.75	2	1	1
New Orleans Times-Picayune	271.00	0	1	0
The New York Times	1155.91	2	6	4
Newsday	865.80	4	3	3
Orlando Sentinel Tribune	356.50	1	1	0
Philadelphia Inquirer	42.00	0	0	1
The Sacramento Bee	673.50	1	1	0
San Diego Union-Tribune	1131.50	2	4	0
San Francisco Chronicle	692.83	3	3	0
The Seattle Times	738.75	2	2	0
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	980.00	1	5	2
St. Petersburg Times	1135.21	1	7	6
USA Today	297.50	0	1	1
The Washington Post	1153.23	3	5	5
The Washington Times	970.66	3	1	5
Money Clip	2227.00	0	0	1
San Fran. Examiner	186.00	0	0	1
Wire services	487.75	12	15	18

n=219

Table 4: Principle Components Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis
Sensational Evidence

	Perpetrator	Religious Link AIDS	Aids-Related Violence
Variables	**Factor 1**	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**
Perpetrator uttered Fear	.864	-.010	-.004
Perpetrator uttered Hatred	.824	.282	-.013
Bashing Mentioned	.555	-.292	.053
AIDS Link to Religion	.069	.877	.038
AIDS-related Violence mentioned	-.114	.120	.902
Violence mentioned	.348	-.379	.513
Total Variance	31.4	19.2	16.9
Eigenvalue	1.88	1.15	1.01
n=153			

**Only one item.

Table 5: Principle Components Factor Analysis
Sensational Evidence: Relative Opinion, Emotion & Fact

	Frame	Summary	Emotion
Variables	**Factor 1**	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**
Lead--Factual	-.926	-.229	-.052
Lead--Opinion	.922	.206	.117
First Paragraph--Factual	-.887	-.325	-.106
First Paragraph--Opinion	.861	.308	.229
Headline--Opinion	.195	.893	.134
Headline--Factual	-.259	-.884	-.120
Overall story--Opinion	.259	.640	.513
Overall story--Factual	-.261	-.630	-.343
Overall story--Emotion	.039	.348	.787
First Paragraph--Emotion	.558	.005	.737
Lead--Emotion	.622	-.067	.634
Headline--Emotion	-.020	.315	.586
Total Variance	53.1	15.4	10.7
Eigenvalue	6.37	1.84	1.27

n=207

Table 6: Principle Components Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis for Educating Democratic Principles

	Rights	Protest
Variables	**Factor 1**	**Factor 2**
First amendment cited	.814	-.276
Civil rights mentioned	.770	.342
Protest mentioned	-.002	.937
Total Variance	42.1	35.6
Eigenvalue	1.26	1.06

n=207; **One item only

Table 7: Principle Components Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis for Quotations of Community Leaders

	Targets	Open-Minds
Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2
Quotes--Gay National Org. Leaders	.859	-.038
Quotes--Gay Local Org. Leaders	.798	.099
Quotes--Race-based Leaders	.659	-.053
Quotes--Relgious Leaders	-.132	.047
Quotes--Civil Rights Leaders	-.015	.734
Quotes--Others	-.040	.617
Quotes--Educators	-.059	.529
Total Variance	26.3	17.3
Eigenvalue	1.83	1.21

n=153

Table 8: Principle Components Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis for Quotations of Official Sources

	Nearness	Far Away
Variables	**Factor 1**	**Factor 2**
Quotes--Nationally-Elected Officers	-.678	-.360
Quotes--Locally-Elected Officers	.673	-.079
Quotes--Police Officers	.492	-.208
Quotes--State-wide Elected Officers	-.080	.921
Total Variance	29.1	25.7
Eigenvalue	1.16	1.02

n=153; *Reversed scale for national officers; **Only one item.

Table 9a: Context of incident and Number of victims

	Overall	Racial	Gay & Lesbian	Religious
Crime, Event, Legal contexts Vs. Election, Features, Book reviews, Politically Correct	$X^2 = 11.0$ $p = .01$** $n = 11$	$X^2 = 6.0$ $p < .05$** $n = 6$	$X^2 = 3.0$ $p = .08$* $n = 3$	$X^2 =$ n.s. n.s.

Table 9b: Mean Number of Words by Context and Topic in Articles about Tolerance or Intolerance

	Overall	Racial	Gay & Lesbian	Religious
Crime, Event, Legal contexts ($n=71$) Vs.	$\bar{X}=695.6$ $s=557$	$\bar{X}=677$ $s=519$	$\bar{X}=805$ $s = 621.6$	$\bar{X}=598.5$ $s = 543.4$
Election, Features, Book reviews, Politically Correct ($n=88$)	$\bar{X}=965.8$ $s=721.1$	$\bar{X}=907.6$ $s=531$	$\bar{X}=1082.3$ $s=652.7$	$\bar{X}=929$ $s=929$

Table 10: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Equations predicting Number of Words

Models	Homosexual Subgroup (n=55)	Racial Subgroup (n=85)	Religious Sub-group
Sensational Evidence			
Perpetrator	.28**	.52***	.24*
Aids-Violence	.02	-.62***	-.32**
Aids-Religious	.28**	-.57**	-.07
Frame	.12	.02	-.02
Summary	.35**	.13	.42**
Emotion	.52**	.09	.17
Tone: Factual	-.44**	-.01	-.39*
Tone: Fearful	.18	-.07	.21
R^2=	42.2%	25.3%	29.7%
Advocate for a cause			
Targets	.20	-.00	-.07
Open-mind	.22	.10	.29**
Nearness	.30*	.15	-.41
Far Away	-.08	-.06	.41
R^2=	20.7%	4.1%	9.9%

Standardized beta regression coefficients (β). ***=$p<.01$ **=$p<.05$ *=$p<.10$

Table 11
Correlation Matrix: Number of Words by
Sensational Evidence & Democratic Ideals

Variable	Perpetrator	Religious Link Aids	Aids-related violence	Principles "Rights"	Protest
Number Words	.27***	-.06	.16**	.19**	-.05
n=220					

$p<.01$*** $p<.05$** $p<.10$*

Table 12
Correlation Matrix: Number of Words by
Official Sources and Community Leaders Factors

Variable	Targets	Open-mind	Nearness	Far Away
Number Words	.09 (.127)	.17** (.018)	.11* (.082)	-.04 (.296)
n=153				

$p<.01$*** $p<.05$** $p<.10$*

Appendix A: Reliability Matrix
Scott's Pi

Variable		Coder 2 v 1	Coder 3 v 1	Coder 4 v 1	Coder 5 v 1	Average
Subject		.727	.526	.584	.615	**.613**
Tone		.460	.676	.770	.382	**.572**
Topic		.868	.986	.946	1.00	**.950**
Date		.944	.978	.950	.952	**.956**
Day of week		.943	.934	.972	.969	**.954**
Placement		.593	.930	.790	.896	**.803**
Article type		.984	.843	.546	.646	.754
Context		.979	.819	.938	.702	**.859**
Geography		.762	.876	.637	.448	**.680**
Region		.973	.855	.931	.901	**.915**
Location		.535	.767	.803	.509	**.653**
Total threat		.691	.858	.879	.724	**.788**
Personal threat		.618	.862	.486	.653	**.654**
Societal threat		.961	.861	.703	.729	**.813**
Circulation		.957	.916	.887	.935	**.923**
Quot: Non-officials		.559	.341	.884	.789	**.643**
Count-Homosexuals		.868	.986	.951	1.00	**.951**
Count- Race		.868	.986	.952	1.00	**.951**
Count- Religious		.978	.986	.951	1.00	**.978**
Democrat. Principles		.852	.835	.850	.780	**.829**
AIDS-Relig. Link		.978	.935	.910	.899	.930
Bashing		.939	.960	.960	.908	.941
Average		.820	.850	.830	.792	
Grand Average						.823

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The Effectiveness of Simple and Stratified Random Sampling in Broadcast News Content Analysis

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Paper presented to the annual convention, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Atlanta, August 1994.

The Effectiveness of Simple and Stratified Random Sampling in Broadcast News Content Analysis

This paper reports an exploration of the effectiveness of different types and size of samples for content analyses of television network news.

Background

Describing the first 60 years of Journalism Quarterly, Stempel noted the growth of published content analyses, from 50 in the first 40 volumes, to 51 in the next 10 (1964-1973) and 106 in the 1974-1983 volumes.[1]

He might also have noted growth in analyses of television and television news: the 1964-1973 index identified three television content analyses, while the 1974-1983 index identified 23, eight focusing on network news.[2] Research has ranged from studies of newscast "geographic focus"[3] to treatment of groups[4] or events,[5] and topic emphasis and similarity.[6]

Yet little attention has been given sampling issues in content analysis. Lichty and Bailey[7] offered a concise discussion of types of samples: pure random; stratified random, insuring that the final sample "will be evenly distributed across the days of the week, weeks, months, or even years" in the population; and purposive consecutive-day week, where a researcher selects a particular week because an event is covered during that period.[8]

But while Lichty and Bailey describe stratifying a broadcast news sample by days of the week (what Jones and Carter[9] call a "constructed week" and others[10] describe as a "composite week") to assure that all days are equally represented, neither they nor other methodologists discuss the impact stratification has on sample representativeness or size.

Riffe, Aust and Lacy,[11] on the other hand, have examined how between-day "cyclic variation" in newspapers affects sampling. Building upon work of Jones and Carter, Mintz[12] and Stempel,[13] they compared simple random, consecutive-day and constructed week (stratified by weekday) samples of different sizes for dailies, concluding that a sample of two constructed weeks was most efficient in representing a year of a daily's content. The effect of stratification is two-fold: it creates homogeneous subgroups (all Mondays in a group, etc.) and prevents chance oversampling of large-newshole Sundays and Wednesdays or small-newshole Saturdays.

Is there similar "cyclic variation" in broadcast news that affects sampling? On the one hand, the nightly newscast's fixed beginning and ending time--unlike a newspaper's number of pages that varies with ad sales--argues against such an effect. Of course there is variability in length of items; the networks can include more, shorter, items as events dictate.

On the other hand, Lacy, Robinson and Riffe[14] examined a year's issues of weekly newspapers and found month-to-month variation affected sample representativeness. Moreover, Lichty and Gomery[15] have shown seasonal variation in viewership; is that paralleled by content variation that could affect sampling?

While no one has explored the impact of cyclic variation in television news sampling, some researchers have assumed--and controlled for--its effect. For example, Riffe _et al_[16] used two constructed (Monday-through-Friday) weeks per quarter (e.g., January-March) to compare nine years of network similarity. Ramaprasad[17] used four constructed weeks per six-month period to look at network differences in international news coverage.

But other approaches are equally common. Another study of international news[18] reported that "(o)ne day per month was randomly selected from the 60 months" in a five-year period to construct 12 composite weeks (whether they controlled for day-to-day variation is unclear). Another examined "bad news,"[19] selecting random days between April 6 and April 26, 1983, "to form one week of Monday through Friday" evening newscasts. Still another, a hard-soft news comparison among networks,[20] used the same two consecutive-day weeks (March 1-7 and October 1-7) for each year between 1972 and 1987 inclusive.

Is the constructed week sample superior to simple random sampling in broadcast news? Should one also stratify for quarter? This study will explore those questions. Absent data on representativeness of different sample types, use of constructed weeks is arguably no more valid than other types of sampling, regardless how many researchers use it.

Equally important, some sampling approaches (e.g., Riffe _et al_'s two constructed weeks per quarter--eight weeks, or 40 days, per year!) may be "overkill," an inefficient use of resources.

Method

Two "populations" (ABC and CBS) of a year's Monday-Friday network newscasts were created using the 1992 Vanderbilt Television News Index and Abstracts descriptions of each newscast. Annual parameters (i.e, per-newscast means) were computed for the populations on five variables. Then different size and type samples were drawn, and sample statistics (i.e., per-newscast means) computed for the same variables. Use of two networks let us examine whether correspondence between parameters and statistics was network-specific.

Variables included total items, international items and U.S. economy items; and time (in seconds) devoted to international and to economic news. Lead-ins (listing upcoming stories), recaps and commentaries were excluded. Between-coder simple agreement was 98% for international news, 94% for economic news and 96% on length in a test of 135 news items.

Three types of samples were compared. Simple random samples of size 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35 and 40 were drawn. The starting size of 5 was arbitrary but comparable to the constructed weeks we would examine. Stratified (by month) samples of two randomly selected weekdays per month (a total of 24 days) also were drawn. Finally, stratified (by weekday and quarter) samples of one constructed week within each quarter (e.g., January-March) were drawn (a total of 20 days).

Sets of 40 different samples from the two populations were selected for each of the described sample-size and technique combinations. For example, 40 samples of five newscasts were selected randomly, 40 samples of 10 newscasts were selected randomly, and so on. Sets of 40 samples each also were drawn to test the two-days-per-month and quarterly constructed week techniques. Overall, a total of 42 sets of 40 samples were selected for each network. Per-newscast means and standard errors for the several variables were calculated from each of the 3,360 samples.

Why 40 samples per technique/size combination? Intervals around the sample means were calculated (using the sample standard error) to determine what percentage of the 40 samples in a set included the population mean, within plus or minus one standard error and within plus or minus two standard errors.

Sample size/technique efficiency was determined by comparing the resulting percentages (e.g., 38 of 40 samples or 95%) to the percentages found in the distribution of sample means under the normal curve justifying the Central Limits Theorem. Because it is a normal curve, in 95% of samples the population mean should fall within two standard errors of the sample mean, and in 68% of samples the population mean should be within one standard error of the sample mean.

A sample size would be adequate if its percentage exceeded or equaled the expected percentages (68% and 95%), provided the next larger tested sample did not drop under the expected percentages. For example, if 95% of sample means from 40 samples of size five were acceptable, but the percentage dropped to 80%

of 40 samples of size 10, we viewed the 95% figure as an anomaly and went on to the next larger sample that exceeded or matched the criteria.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1 shows population means, standard deviations and coefficients of variation (CV) for the content categories for each network. The CV is the standard deviation divided by the mean, and indexes category variability. The CVs show there is considerably more variation in network news content than in newspapers.[21] The CVs are similar for both networks in three categories, with CBS showing more variation in total economic stories and international news time. The CV for economic news time is above 1.0 (the standard deviation is larger than the mean) for both ABC and CBS, indicating considerable variability.

We then examined this variation, controlling for month and day of the week (see Table 2). In all content categories for both networks, the range of means was greater for months than for days of the week.[22] Monthly variations in content contribute more to the coefficients of variation than do weekday variations. Equally important, they point up the risk in use of consecutive-day samples, so named because successive days are examined (e.g., Scott and Gobetz's[23] use of March 1-7). Between-month variability suggests that any consecutive-day sample is unlikely to be representative of time periods spanning several months. Riffe, Aust and Lacy[24] demonstrated the inefficiency of consecutive-day sampling in their study of newspapers, a medium with far less variability[25] than television news.

The first step in answering the research questions was to generate the sets of 40 randomly selected samples of various sizes (see Table 3). For each set of 40, we determined the percentage of sample means within one or two standard errors of the population mean (e.g., for ABC's total stories, only 67.5% of the 40 five-day simple random samples were within one standard error and 92.5% were within two standard errors).

In only five of 10 "test" situations (each of two networks, examined for five content categories) did simple random samples prove adequate by exceeding or matching both critical values. A sample of 35 weekdays was adequate for ABC's total stories, international news stories and economic stories. A sample of 25 was adequate for ABC's seconds of international news and a sample of 35 was adequate for CBS' international news stories. The percentages for total items in CBS' 10-day samples (70% and 95%) illustrate our decision rule. Here, a simple random sampling technique appeared to be adequate for sample size 10, but became inadequate at larger sample sizes.

In some situations, the sample technique/size combination "failed" the test by only one or two cases (27 of 40 samples yields an unacceptable 67.5% while 28 of 40 yields an acceptable 70%). In some tests, an individual sample's confidence intervals may have missed including the population mean by less than 0.1.

We note these patterns to reemphasize the variability of TV content and to highlight the potential pitfalls for samplers.

Of course, the patterns also suggest a limitation of selecting 40 samples instead of 100.[26] Originally, we had planned to return to simple random sampling and to draw more, and larger, samples than those described in Table 3, but the analysis discussed below showed other sampling techniques work better than simple random sampling. Moreover, our goal was efficiency (to have the smallest number of days possible in a reliable sample). We'd found limited success with samples of 25-40. Could we be as or more efficient using a smaller sample drawn by a different technique?

We began by stratifying for month (recall that coefficients of variation had shown between-month differences to be a greater source of variation than between-weekday differences). Because of the failure of simple random samples smaller than 25 to provide good population estimates, we drew two weekdays per month (yielding a comparable n of 24) instead of one (n=12). A set of 40 such samples was drawn for testing.

This 24-day, monthly stratified sample worked well enough that, when we moved on to quarterly stratification, we constructed only one week per quarter (five days per quarter, or a total of 20 days) rather than two (a total of 40).

Thus, Table 4 shows the comparisons among three different sampling techniques: simple random (25 cases), one constructed week per quarter (20 cases), and two randomly selected days per month (24 cases). The sampling techniques that exceeded the 68% and 95% critical values for both one and two standard errors are underlined. As had been shown in Table 3, simple random sampling was adequate in only four of ten situations (ABC's international stories and time, and CBS' economic stories and time). The constructed-week-per-quarter sample was adequate in three of 10 situations (CBS' total international items and time, and ABC's international time). The monthly stratification was adequate in eight of ten situations.

DISCUSSION

Of sampling techniques tested here, the most efficient for weekday television network news is monthly stratified: random selection of two days from each month. This technique provided adequate estimates of annual parameters on four of five content categories for each network. In the two failures, only one or two (of the 40) samples kept the technique from meeting or exceeding the critical values. Had sets of 50 or 100 samples been taken, the technique might well have proven adequate in all situations.

Yet the failures merit mention because they are so illustrative of sampling problems that can occur in a highly variable population. The two content categories where stratified monthly sampling failed were ones with comparatively high variability: total economic items at CBS (coefficient of variation=.843) and economic news time at ABC (CV=1.18).

Obviously, some content categories create bigger sampling problems than others. The monthly stratified sampling technique is recommended as the best of the three tested here, but with the proviso that additional cases be selected if the initial sampled cases show coefficients of variation above .5. Additional randomly selected cases would help counteract the influence of larger or smaller values that contribute to the high CVs. An additional 10 cases would probably be adequate. This would make a total of 34, near the 35 cases that proved adequate with some simple random samples.

This study also has interesting implications for television news content analysis. First, the finite "newshole" on a nightly newscast means that news selection is much more sensitive to the news environment than is news selection at newspapers. Newspapers can add space as needed and many have daily sections dedicated to specific topics (whether news is selected for those sections because of newsworthiness or because the sections exist is problematic). The result is a relatively stable distribution of news among topics, even though individual stories vary.[27] Television news has only about 22 minutes to fill and can add time only in emergencies. As a result, the news selection process means some topics may receive minimal treatment or be ignored entirely on a given night. Big news events--even those that are not emergencies--can push other topics off the newscast entirely. This may mean less newscast-to-newscast topic stability. This variability requires larger samples, stratified in different ways than with newspapers.

Second, the observed monthly variation merits further exploration. Because network news is located in New York and

Washington, these variations might represent cycles in government and business. Such cycles would be worth studying as an extension of agenda setting research.

Third, existing research in network television news may need reconsidering. Some studies have used samples that may not have been large enough or may have been selected in ways that could have reduced their representativeness. The need for replication becomes more important under such conditions.

Fourth, monthly variability in topics may continue over a longer cycle, beyond the 12 months studied here. It may be that topics and time allocation in television network news content continue to change, from year to year. More systematic and continuing content analyses would be worthwhile to establish the possible changing nature of TV news. The half-life of research results may not be as long as researchers suppose.

Of course, this issue of the validity of television content analysis also applies to this study. Periodic sampling efforts need to be conducted, say every five years, to see whether network news coverage patterns have altered enough to change the comparative efficiency of different forms of sampling. Scholars cannot assume that efficient sampling methods remain stable across time.

Notes

1. Guido H. Stempel, "Introduction," Journalism Quarterly Index to Volumes 51-60, 1974-1983 (Columbia, S.C.: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, 1984), p. iii.

2. We did not examine each study so catalogued in the index; our rough estimates of growth are thus only as good as the indexing process itself.

3. E.g., James B. Weaver, Christopher J. Porter and Margaret E. Evans, "Patterns of Foreign News Coverage on U.S. Network TV: A 10-Year Analysis," Journalism Quarterly 61 (Summer 1984):356-363; Jyotika Ramaprasad, "Content, Geography, Concentration and Consonance in Foreign News Coverage of ABC, NBC and CBS," International Communication Bulletin 28 (Spring 1993):10-14; but see also, for domestic news coverage, Joseph R. Dominick, "Geographic Bias in National TV News," Journal of Communication 27 (Autumn 1977):94-99.

4. Churchill Roberts, "The Presentation of Blacks in Television Network Newscasts," Journalism Quarterly 52 (Spring 1975):50-55; Joseph R. Dominick, "Business Coverage in Network Newscasts," Journalism Quarterly 58 (Summer 1981):179-185, 191; Donna M. Randall, "The Portrayal of Corporate Crime in Network Television Newscasts," Journalism Quarterly 64 (Spring 1987):150-153.

5. Tony Atwater, "Network Evening News Coverage of the TWA Hostage Crisis," Journalism Quarterly 64 (Summer-Autumn 1987):520-525; David F. Alteheide, "Three-in-One News: Network News Coverage of Iran," Journalism Quarterly 59 (Autumn 1982):482-486; or Milan D. Meeske and Mohamad H. Javaheri, "Network Television Coverage of the Iranian Hostage Crisis," Journalism Quarterly 59 (Winter 1982):641-645.

6. James B. Lemert, "Content Duplication by the Networks in Competing Evening Newscasts," Journalism Quarterly 51 (Summer 1974):238-244; Joe S. Foote and Michael E. Steele, "Degree of Conformity in Lead Stories in Early Evening Network TV Newscasts," Journalism Quarterly 63 (Spring 1986):19-23; Guido H. Stempel III, "Gatekeeping: The Mix of Topics and the Selection of Stories," Journalism Quarterly 62 (Winter 1985):791-796, 815; Stempel, "Topic and Story Choice of Five Network Newscasts," Journalism Quarterly 65 (Autumn 1988):750-752; Daniel Riffe, Brenda Ellis, Momo K. Rogers, Roger L. Van Ommeren and Kieran A. Woodman, "Gatekeeping and the Network News Mix," Journalism Quarterly (Summer 1986):315-321; and Ramaprasad, "Content, Geography, Concentration and Consonance."

7. Lawrence W. Lichty and George A. Bailey, "Reading the Wind: Reflections on Content Analysis of Broadcast News," in William Adams and Fay Schreibman, eds., Television Network News: Issues in Current Research (Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, 1978): 111-137.

8. Presumably, the authors differentiate this technique from the frequently used convenience sample. Kolbe and Burnett found 81% of 103 ad content studies used convenience samples and 19% used probability samples. However, Kolbe and Burnett's sample of 103 studies was itself a convenience sample. See Richard H. Kolbe and Melissa S. Burnett, "Content-Analysis Research: An Examination of Applications with Directives for Improving Research Reliability and Objectivity," Journal of Consumer Research 18 (September 1991):243-250.

9. One Monday is selected randomly from all Mondays, one Tuesday from all Tuesdays, etc. Robert L. Jones and Roy E. Carter, Jr., "Some Procedures for Estimating 'News Hole' in Content Analysis," Public Opinion Quarterly, 23 (Fall 1959):399-403.

10. Roger D. Wimmer and Joseph R. Dominick, Mass Media Research: An Introduction, 3rd Ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1991), p. 163.

11. Daniel Riffe, Charles F. Aust and Stephen Lacy, "The Effectiveness of Random, Consecutive Day and Constructed Week Sampling in Newspaper Content Analysis," Journalism Quarterly, 70 (Spring 1993):133-139.

12. Alexander Mintz, "The Feasibility of the Use of Samples in Content Analysis," in Harold Lasswell, Nathan Leites and associates, Language of Politics (New York: George W. Stewart, Publishers, Inc., 1949), 127-152.

13. Guido H. Stempel III, "Sample Size for Classifying Subject Matter in Dailies," Journalism Quarterly, 29 (Summer 1952):333-334.

14. Stephen Lacy, Kay Robinson and Daniel Riffe, "Sample Size in Content Analysis of Weekly Newspapers," paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Convention, Kansas City, August 1993.

15. Lawrence W. Lichty and Douglas Gomery, "More is Less," in Philip S. Cook, Douglas Gomery and Lawrence W. Lichty, The Future of News (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 19.

16. Riffe, Ellis, Rogers, Van Ommeren and Woodman, "Gatekeeping and the Network News Mix."

17. Ramaprasad, "Content, Geography, Concentration and Consonance."

18. Weaver, Porter and Evans, "Patterns of Foreign News Coverage."

19. Gerald C. Stone and Elinor Grusin, "Network TV as the Bad News Bearer," Journalism Quarterly, 61 (Autumn 1984):517-523, 592.

20. David K. Scott and Robert H. Gobetz, "Hard News/Soft News Content of the National Broadcast Networks, 1972-1987," Journalism Quarterly, 69 (Summer 1992):406-412.

21. Lacy, Robinson and Riffe, in "Sample Size in Content Analysis of Weekly Newspapers," reported low coefficients of variability among weeklies.

22. The same pattern (not shown) was found with the range of standard deviations.

23. Scott and Gobetz, "Hard News/Soft News."

24. Riffe, Aust and Lacy, "The Effectiveness of Random, Consecutive Day and Constructed Week Sampling."

25. Lacy, Robinson and Riffe, "Sample Size in Content Analysis of Weekly Newspapers."

26. In their studies, Riffe, Lacy, Aust and Robinson used sets of only 20 samples per technique. The impact of a single sample failure would obviously be even greater. See Riffe, Aust and Lacy, "The Effectiveness of Random, Consecutive Day and Constructed Week Sampling," and Lacy, Robinson and Riffe, "Sample Size in Content Analysis of Weekly Newspapers."

27. Stempel, "Gatekeeping: The Mix of Topics," and "Topic and Story Choice."

Table 1

Population Means, Standard Deviations and Coefficients of Variation for Five Content Measures and Two Networks

	ABC			CBS		
	Mean	S.D.	C.V.	Mean	S.D	C.V.
Content Measures						
Total Stories	11.21	1.96	.175	9.75	1.77	.182
Total International Stories	4.05	1.65	.407	3.29	1.58	.480
Total Economic Stories	1.81	1.12	.619	1.08	.91	.843
Seconds of international news	398.99	208.71	.523	327.53	218.35	.667
Seconds of economic news	132.14	155.39	1.18	126.14	143.30	1.14

Table 2

Range of Monthly and Daily Means

for Five Content Measures and Two Networks

	Range of Monthly Means	
	ABC	CBS
Content Measures		
Total Stories	10.23 - 12.00	7.95 - 11.05
Total International Stories	3.00 - 5.05	2.48 - 4.35
Total Economic Stories	1.24 - 3.86	.67 - 1.83
Seconds of international news	248.00 - 668.64	172.38 - 627.83
Seconds of economic news	70.0 - 371.36	79.09 - 203.91
	Range of Daily Means	
Total Stories	10.78 - 11.52	9.49 - 10.02
Total International Stories	3.72 - 4.65	3.13 - 3.45
Total Economic Stories	1.50 - 1.92	.86 - 1.27
Seconds of international news	377.36 - 461.15	314.72 - 352.16
Seconds of economic news	94.42 - 150.75	94.12 - 144.80

TABLE 3

Percentage of Random Sample Means in Sets of 40 Samples Falling Within One and Two Standard Errors of Population Mean for ABC and CBS Weekday Evening Newscast and Various Types of Variables

	ABC News		CBS News	
Within	1 S.E.	2 S.E.	1 S.E.	2 S.E.
Days in Sample	%	%	%	%
	Total Stories			
5	67.5	92.5	72.5	92.5
10	60.0	95.0	70.0	95.0
15	60.0	82.5	65.0	92.5
20	50.0	85.0	60.0	92.5
25	60.0	85.0	62.5	90.0
30	65.0	92.5	62.5	92.5
35	75.0	97.5	67.5	92.5
40	72.5	97.5	60.0	97.5
	Total International Stories			
5	67.5	95.0	65.0	87.5
10	62.5	87.5	65.0	90.0
15	65.0	92.5	75.0	97.5
20	75.0	92.5	70.0	95.0
25	70.0	97.5	57.5	95.0
30	65.0	97.5	55.0	92.5
35	77.5	100.0	75.0	97.5
40	77.5	97.5	75.0	100.0
	Total Economic Stories			
5	55.0	77.5	62.5	85.0

10	50.0	85.0	77.5	95.0
15	67.5	97.5	65.0	95.0
20	62.5	97.5	67.5	90.0
25	50.0	87.5	72.5	97.5
30	67.5	97.5	67.5	95.0
35	82.5	95.0	77.5	100.0
40	77.5	95.0	67.5	87.5
Seconds of International News				
5	62.5	87.5	75.0	87.5
10	67.5	90.0	65.0	92.5
15	67.5	87.5	72.5	97.5
20	60.0	87.5	77.5	95.0
25	75.0	100.0	60.0	97.5
30	70.0	97.5	65.0	100.0
35	82.5	100.0	77.5	100.0
40	77.5	97.5	65.0	90.0
Seconds of Economic News				
5	65.0	80.0	70.0	80.0
10	55.0	87.5	72.5	100.0
15	70.0	97.5	52.5	95.0
20	70.0	100.0	65.0	90.0
25	60.0	92.5	80.0	97.5
30	55.0	95.0	52.5	100.0
35	65.0	97.5	77.5	97.5
40	75.0	92.5	62.5	90.0

Note: The underline means the sampling exceeded chance for both one and two standard errors.

TABLE 4

Percentage of Means in 40 Samples Falling Within One and Two Standard Errors of Population Mean for ABC and CBS Weekday Evening Newscast with Simple Random for 25 Days, Stratified Monthly and Constructed Week by Quarter Sampling

	ABC News		CBS News	
Within	1 S.E.	2 S.E.	1 S.E.	2 S.E.
	%	%	%	%
Total Stories				
Stratified Monthly (Two days per month, n = 24)	70.0	95.0	70.0	100.0
Constructed Weeks (One week per quarter, n = 20)	67.5	95.0	75.0	92.5
Simple Random (n = 25)	60.0	85.0	62.5	90.0
Total International Stories				
Stratified Monthly	70.0	97.5	80.0	100.0
Constructed Weeks	65.0	97.5	80.0	97.5
Simple Random	70.0	97.5	57.5	95.0
Total Economic Stories				
Stratified Monthly	80.0	97.5	67.5	95.0
Constructed Weeks	77.5	92.5	72.5	90.0
Simple Random	50.0	87.5	72.5	97.5
Seconds of International News				
Stratified Monthly	82.5	97.5	82.5	100.0
Constructed Weeks	72.5	100.0	72.5	97.5
Simple Random	75.0	100.0	60.0	97.5

Seconds of Economic News

Stratified Monthly	65.0	92.5	72.5	95.0
Constructed Weeks	72.5	90.0	52.5	77.5
Simple Random	60.0	92.5	80.0	97.5

Note: The underline means the sampling exceeded chance for both one and two standard errors.

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Race as a Variable in the Agenda-Setting Process

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Race as a Variable in the Agenda-Setting Process

Abstract

A two-site survey examined potential differences between races in the agenda-setting process. The findings suggest that whites and minority groups did not have different issue agendas, nor did the groups differ on the magnitude of agenda-setting effects. In addition, the minorities in the site that had a small minority population (Eugene, Oregon) did not "acculturate" themselves into the mostly white community more than in the site with a high minority population (Tampa, Florida). Minorities in the site with a large minority population did demonstrate more concern with issues that received little or no coverage, perhaps an indication that they had been exposed to these issues through other available media produced specifically for minorities. Race, then, played a limited role in the agenda-setting process.

On the one hand, the results show that overall issue agendas were very similar between minorities and whites, suggesting that the agenda-setting effect may function more powerfully at the societal level than at the individual level. Nonetheless, several differences were found on individual issues. Lack of morality was not mentioned by either minority group in our study, but did appear on the whites' agendas for both Tampa and Eugene. Drug abuse was a relatively low priority for three groups of our study, but ranked fifth on the minorities' agenda in Eugene. Civil rights was mentioned as an issue only by the minorities in Tampa.

Race as a Variable in the Agenda-Setting Process

In the more than two decades of research into the agenda-setting process of the news media (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), researchers have generally found that members of the public can learn the relative importance of issues from the amount of coverage devoted to the issues in the news media. Even the early studies in this area, however, did not suggest agenda-setting effects would be consistent across time or for all individuals. Numerous other variables, such as personal characteristics of respondents, are "the building blocks of public issues -- which cannot always be predicted (Shaw and Clemmer, 1977, p. 39)."

Researchers, for the most part, have seldom examined individual differences and differences in susceptibility to media agenda-setting influences. As McCombs (1981) notes, the vast majority of agenda-setting studies have examined aggregate data, utilizing the issue -- rather than the individual respondent -- as the unit of measure.

This study will attempt to examine the agenda-setting process as it relates to individuals of different races -- whites, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Native Americans and Hispanics. Since minority populations tend to use newspapers less than whites (Fielder and Tipton, 1986), and since the news is generally reported from a "white male perspective (Kerner, 1968)," minorities will likely have issue priorities different from whites. Examining individual differences will lend some insight into the information processing involved in the agenda-setting process.

In addition, data will come from a survey conducted in two sites with vastly different populations. Site 1 is Tampa, Florida, with a large minority population of more than 20 percent. Site 2 is the greater Eugene, Oregon, area, with a small minority population of less than 10 percent. Logically, the two minority populations of these two cities, because of their size differences, should differ.

Theoretical framework

* Potential differences between racial groups: Researchers have largely ignored the role of demographics in the agenda-setting process. Indeed, Hill (1985) notes the total lack of previous research in this area. Demographic variables, however, could play important roles in the agenda-setting process.

Demographics could indirectly influence individuals' susceptibility to agenda-setting effects because these variables -- including race -- have been found to influence news media usage patterns. Thus, if minorities have lower exposure to the news media than whites -- as Fielder and Tipton (1986) found -- they might also be less susceptible to agenda-setting effects because of their low exposure to media messages.

However, the question of minority readership of newspapers, like so much of mass communication research, may well depend upon the research question being asked.

For example, some researchers have held that minorities in the United States, especially African-Americans, tend to rely on television as a primary source of information (Bogart, 1981), that newspaper readership studies show that minorities are less likely to read newspapers than the majority (Tipton and Fielder, 1986), and that African-Americans tend to know less about mass media operations and are less cynical about influences on the media (Becker, Kosicki, and Jones, 1992). Those studies found, however, that differences between African-Americans and whites tended to disappear when education and income were higher.

In a recent essay, Cranberg and Rodriguez (1994) argue that little difference exists in the newspaper readership between African-Americans and whites. They compared the distribution of adult population by race (white, 85.48%, African-American, 11.36%) and the distribution of newspaper readers by race (white 86.35%, African-American 11.25%) and found little difference. Only percentages on Hispanic readership differed, and the authors credited that difference to language barriers. They quote researchers Michael and Judee Burgoon, who argue that "simply stated, socio-economic status is a much more important determinant of newspaper readership than race or ethnic origin."

Becker, Kosicki, and Jones (1992) readily admit that education and economic factors explain some of their findings in how African-Americans perceive media bias, but also point out that "other (factors) can be more ingrained, woven into the cultural fabric or historical experiences of the groups being compared. At this point, the evidence is that some of the differences between the groups are more than socio-economic in nature." (p. 134)

In addition, the news media have long been criticized for having a lack of diversity in their newsrooms. The news media, in general, are dominated by white males (see Weaver and Wilhoit, 1991; Guimary, 1988, 1984). The Kerner Commission in 1968 concluded that the media define news from a white male perspective (Kerner, 1968), thus ignoring issues of importance to minority populations. Therefore, since the media cover issues that are important to whites, perhaps minority populations will be less susceptible to agenda-setting effects since the press is not covering issues that are important to them.

Bogart (1981) and Martindale (1986) both argue that the mass media have been insensitive to minority concerns. Cherry (1991) argues that the mass media have devalued social systems of minorities by omitting coverage of them.

Differences in exposure levels of minorities and whites, then, suggest the following hypothesis:

* H1: White respondents will tend to display stronger agenda-setting effects than minority respondents.

* Potential differences between sites: As noted earlier, the two sites in this study have vastly different minority populations. Because of the differences in the sizes of minority populations, the respondents in the two sites likely will differ in agenda-setting.

One reason differences may be found between the two sites is because of variations in the concentration of ethnic minorities. Because Eugene has such a small ethnic concentration (7 percent), minorities in Eugene may feel pressure to become "acculturated" into the mostly white population or run the risk of becoming isolated.

The concept of acculturation has been supported previously. Kim (1979) defined acculturation as an instance where an ethnic individual becomes acquainted with and adopts "the norms and values of a salient reference group."

Among the variables influencing the level of acculturation of individuals is ethnic concentration. Shoemaker, Reese, Danielson and Hsu (1987), for example, found that the number of other ethnic minorities in an area was negatively correlated with acculturation effects. Their results showed that in cities with high Hispanic populations, Hispanics were more likely to use Spanish-language media and exhibit other Spanish-language communication behaviors. In other words, when Hispanic individuals lived in areas with high Hispanic populations, they were less likely to be acculturated into the Anglo population.

While acculturation has been applied most often to foreign immigrants (for example, Kim, 1977; DeFleur and Cho, 1957), the concept may also apply to other minorities as well. In the case of the present study, minorities in the Eugene area, because of their low numbers, may feel isolated unless they become "acculturated" into the mostly white population. Thus, if they become acculturated, they should have more in common with the white population in Eugene than the minority population has with the whites in Tampa. These commonalities may include the agenda of issues with which they are concerned.

In addition, the minority population in Tampa has more options open to them for information on issues than the minorities in Eugene have. Tampa has several alternative newspapers that serve minority populations, including the Sentinel-Bulletin, an African-American weekly, and La Gaceta, the nation's only tri-lingual newspaper, which is published in English, Spanish and Italian.

Minorities in Tampa also have more interpersonal communication channels with other minorities open to them. As Wanta and Hu (1992) argue, interpersonal communication in some cases can interfere with agenda-setting influences by providing individuals with salience cues that conflict with media messages.

Thus, because of the greater number of options for gaining information from both media and interpersonal communication sources, minorities in Tampa may exhibit less susceptibility to agenda-setting effects. In other words, since the mainstream news media are just one of several sources available in Tampa, minorities here may receive conflicting salience cues and thus may be influenced less by the agenda-setting influence of the press.

Thus, two additional agenda-setting hypotheses will be tested:

* H2: The minority population will mirror the white population on agenda-setting effects more closely in Eugene than in Tampa.

* H3: The agenda of issues deemed important by minorities will mirror the issue agenda of the white population more closely in Eugene than in Tampa.

Method

* Respondents: A telephone survey was conducted in two sites in early February 1994. A total of 577 respondents were interviewed.

Site 1 was Tampa, Florida. Tampa is the largest city in Hillsborough County, which has a population of 834,054 according to the 1990 census. African-Americans comprise 12 percent and Hispanics 11 percent of the population. Though most calls were placed in Hillsborough County, a few phone numbers were exchanges in Pinellas County, which contains the cities of St. Petersburg and Clearwater. The regional reference, Tampa Bay, usually refers to both counties, which boasts a population of 1,685,713.

Site 2 was the greater Eugene, Oregon, area, which has a population of about 200,000, 93.6 percent of which is white. According to the 1990 census, the population includes 1.1 percent African-Americans, 1.9 percent Asian-Americans, 0.9 percent Native Americans and 2.4 percent Hispanics.

Respondents were randomly selected using a form of random digit dialing. The first four digits were randomly selected from the area telephone directory. This method ensured that local exchanges were included. Including the fourth digit increased the likelihood that working phone numbers would be included. The final three digits then were randomly selected. The response rate was 60 percent.

To ensure a reasonable number of minorities was included in the Eugene survey, additional minority respondents were overselected. A question asking the respondents their race was used as a filter question in the introduction during one day of the survey. Only minority respondents were asked to participate in the survey on this day. The process essentially doubled the number of minority respondents, raising the total to 15 percent of the sample.

Interviewers in Tampa were students at the University of South Florida. Interviewers in Eugene were students at the University of Oregon.

* Agenda-setting effects: To examine which groups were more susceptible to agenda-setting effects, an agenda-setting effects score was computed.

First, three issues that received extensive media coverage were selected to be included in the study. To determine which issues would be included, the content of several news media was analyzed for the four weeks before the beginning of the survey period. Zucker (1978) and Winter and Eyal (1981) found four weeks was the optimal time lag for agenda-setting effects to occur.

All stories carried on the broadcasts of the ABC World News Tonight and the news programs from a local station in the two sites of the study were coded. Stories carried on the front pages of daily newspapers serving the two areas -- the Tampa Tribune and the Eugene Register-Guard -- also were included.

The three issues that received the greatest media coverage were then chosen to be included in the study: crime, the economy and health care. To mask the purpose of the study, nine other issues also were included: homelessness, international problems, race relations, drug abuse, the environment, the AIDS epidemic, government responsiveness, the state of the American family, and welfare reform.

To gauge the magnitude of media agenda-setting effects, interviewers read respondents the list of issues and asked if they were "extremely concerned, very concerned, somewhat concerned, a little concerned or not at all concerned" with each issue. The order of placement for the issues that received extensive coverage and the other nine issues was randomly determined.

Scores for the three issues that received extensive media coverage were then summed. This score, then, was an estimate of the magnitude of media agenda-setting effects for each respondent. The Cronbach's alpha was .65.

The media agenda-setting effects scores were then compared across groups through an analysis of variance for each site. If Hypothesis 1 is supported, the mean for this variable for whites will be significantly larger than the mean for the minority groups at each site. In other words, whites will be more susceptible to agenda-setting effects than minorities.

To test Hypothesis 2, the minority groups were collapsed. A T-Test then compared the scores for whites and minorities on this agenda-setting effects variable. If Hypothesis 2 is supported, the T-value for Tampa will be larger than the T-value for Eugene. In other words, the whites and minorities in Tampa will differ more in their susceptibility to media agenda-setting effects than will the whites and minorities in Eugene. The minorities in Tampa, because they have more media and interpersonal communication options open to them, will conform less to the media agenda than the minorities in Eugene. In addition, they will feel less pressure to acculturate themselves into the dominant culture and thus will be less influenced by the mainstream news media. Since whites in both sites will be influenced by the mainstream news media -- as the agenda-setting hypothesis predicts -- a comparison of the two sites will show that the mean agenda-setting effects score will differ more broadly between white and non-white populations for the Eugene sample than for the Tampa sample

One additional test was conducted with the list of issue conerns. Scores on three issues that received little or no media coverage -- the AIDS epidemic, homelessness and government responsiveness -- were summed to form a "low-coverage issue concern" measure. Because these issues received little coverage in the mainstream media, respondents would have had to learn salience cues for these issues from other sources. Thus, minorities should score higher on this measure than whites -- especially in Tampa, where minorities have a wider range of information options than they do in Eugene. The Cronbach's alpha for this index was .64.

* Issue agendas: To test Hypothesis 3, the personal agendas of the minority and non-minority groups in this study were compared. A single open-ended item

asked respondents "What is the number one problem facing our country today?" This is the traditional agenda-setting question (see McCombs and Shaw, 1972). The responses were aggregated to form an agenda of issues for minority and non-minority groups at both sites. The issue agendas were then compared across groups at each site through a Spearman rank-order correlation. The Spearman rho examined if minorities in the two sites of our study held similar relative issue concerns as the whites in the sites.

Next, the Spearman rank-order correlations were compared across the two sites. If Hypothesis 3 is supported, the rho for site 2 (Eugene) will be larger than the rho for site 1 (Tampa), which would suggest that the minorities and whites in Eugene have issue agendas that are more similar than the issue agendas for minorities and whites in Tampa.

* Methodological advantages and disadvantages: The main strength of the present study is our operationalization of agenda-setting effects. Researchers previously have struggled with ways of operationalizing this variable at the individual level. Hill (1985), for example, used a five-point Likert-type scale to compute individuals' agendas. This method, though, produced a large number of ties among issues, which likely confounded his results. Lasorsa and Wanta (1990) compared individuals' responses to the "most important problem" question with where this issue ranked on the media agenda. This "media conformity score," however, dealt with only one issue.

Our agenda-setting effects measure, however, is essentially an index indicating respondents' concern with the top three issues on the media agenda. Thus, we believe our measure is a much more accurate indicator of agenda-setting effects.

The main shortcoming of the present study is that we collapsed all minorities into one minority group for the tests of Hypothesis 2 and 3. Admittedly, differences could be found across different minority groups. However, as Becker, Kosicki and Jones (1992) point out, many previous studies have treated minorities as a single group because of the small number of minority respondents in many samples. Examining one group of minorities in relation to whites -- the purpose of the present study -- allows for more powerful statistical tests, especially in the case of the comparisons of issue agendas in the test for Hypothesis 3. In addition, one rationale behind the hypotheses is based on the notion that minorities may feel isolated in areas with extremely high white populations (in the case of the present study, Eugene, Oregon).

Nonetheless, we did run analysis of variance tests examining all minority groups separately and their agenda-setting effects score -- in the tests for Hypothesis 1.

Results

Hypothesis 1 predicted that whites would be more susceptible to agenda-setting effects than minorities in our two sites. This hypothesis was not supported.

Neither the ANOVA for the Eugene sample nor the ANOVA for the Tampa sample showed any statistically significant differences between any of the racial groups on the agenda-setting effects variable, as Table 1 details.

The same trend was found when T-Tests were computed examining whites with all minorities collapsed into one group. As Table 2 shows, while minorities in Tampa had slightly higher agenda-setting effects scores than whites (means: 12.39 to 12.20), the minorities in Eugene had slightly lower agenda-setting effects scores than whites (means: 11.34 to 11.71). Neither of the T-Tests was statistically significant. In other words, whites and minorities did not differ on their magnitude of agenda-setting effects.

A significant difference did emerge from one of the comparisons of concern levels for issues that received little or no coverage. As Table 3 shows, the minorities in Tampa demonstrated a higher level of concern with the low-coverage issues than the whites in Tampa (means: 11.63 to 10.71, T = 2.38, p = .02). In other words, minorities in Tampa were concerned with issues that received little or no coverage in the news media more than the whites in Tampa. This finding was not replicated with the Eugene sample.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the minority population would mirror the non-minority population on the magnitude of agenda-setting effects more closely in Eugene than in Tampa. In other words, the T-value for Tampa should be larger than the T-value for Eugene on the agenda-setting effects variable.

A comparison of the T-values in Table 2, however, shows that both were very small and neither was statistically significant. The T-value for Eugene (1.10) was slightly larger than the T-value for Tampa (-0.63). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the agenda of issues deemed important by minorities will be more similar to the issue agenda of the white population in Eugene than the same comparison in Tampa. As with the previous hypothesis, the findings here show little difference between the two sites. Table 4 shows that the Spearman rho comparing the issue agendas of Eugene was remarkably similar to the rho comparing issue agendas of Tampa (rhos: .60 for Eugene to .59 for Tampa). Both are statistically significant, indicating that the issue agendas of minorities and white were extremely similar at both sites. In other words, the rankings of issues mentioned as the most important problem facing our country today were very similar for minorities and whites at both sites of our study.

While the Spearman rhos show that issue agendas were very similar, some individual issues were ranked differently by the two groups. Lack of morality was not mentioned by either minority group in our study, but did appear on the whites' agendas for both Tampa and Eugene. Drug abuse was a relatively low priority for three groups of our study, but ranked fifth on the minorities' agenda in Eugene. Civil rights was mentioned as an issue only by the minorities in Tampa. It tied for the fourth most important problem for this group. International problems and education were ranked higher for both whites and minorities in Eugene, while unemployment was ranked higher by both groups in Tampa.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine potential differences in the agenda-setting process for whites and minorities through a two-site survey. The sites of the survey were ideally suited for such a project, given the fact that one site had a large minority population (Tampa, Florida, more than 23 percent) and the other site had a very small minority population (Eugene, Oregon, less than 7 percent). However, none of the three hypotheses tested here were supported.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that white respondents would display stronger agenda-setting effects than minority respondents. However, all minority groups and whites displayed very similar susceptibility to agenda-setting effects. All racial groups held similar levels of concern for the three issues that received the most coverage in the news media immediately before our survey period.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the minority population would mirror the white population on agenda-setting effects more closely in Eugene than in Tampa. However, minorities in Eugene did not acculturate themselves into the white population more than the minorities in Tampa did. Again, minorities at both sites showed similar tendencies toward agenda-setting influences.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the agenda of issues deemed important by minorities would mirror the issue agenda of the white population more closely in

Eugene than in Tampa. Again, the hypothesis was not supported. The issue agendas of minorities and whites were very similar in both Eugene and Tampa.

According to the results here, issue agendas, as well as susceptibility to agenda-setting effects, were very similar across racial groups. Minorities and whites appear to have processed issue salience cues transmitted through the news media at extremely similar degrees.

In addition, since little difference was found across the two sites of our study, the concept of acculuration was not supported for the minority populations examined here. Minority concentration played no role in the acculturation of minority populations in the white populations of our two sites -- at least in so far as agenda-setting influences were concerned.

The minority populations in both sites of the study did not differ from the white population to different degrees on agenda-setting. Thus, minorities in Eugene, which has an extremely small minority population, did not acculurate themselves into the mostly white population more than the minorities in Tampa, which has a relatively large minority population.

The one area in which the sites did differ is on concern with issues that received little coverage in the news media. Minorities in Tampa thought issues that received little coverage were more important than the white population thought they were. Possibly, this finding is due to the fact that Tampa has several alternative media sources that serve minority populations. Indeed, Tampa has a long, multicultural history as evidenced through its shipping and cigar manufacturing. In fact, the newspaper La Gaceta, mentioned earlier, has been published much of the century in three languages.

It is likely, then, that minorities in Tampa received salience cues on the issues of AIDS, homelessness and government responsiveness from these alternative media sources. Minorities in Tampa also may have received salience cues on these issues from interpersonal communication sources, since they had a larger number of interpersonal communication options open to them.

The influence of interpersonal communication upon the findings of this study, however, is unclear. A T-Test comparing the interpersonal communication levels of respondents revealed no difference between minorities and whites in the Tampa sample. In other words, minorities in Tampa did not take part in interpersonal communication more than whites in Tampa.

However, exposure to ethnic newspapers may have come into play here as well. If whites talked to other whites about important issues, the issues they discussed may have been issues that received extensive media coverage in the mainstream press. In other words, exposure to the mainstream press may have provided respondents with an agenda of issues for their discussions. If this were the case, the interpersonal communication may have reinforced the agenda-setting influence of the news media.

Minorities, on the other hand, may have been discussing issues other than those covered in the mainstream news media -- issues that may have received coverage in the minority press that was readily available in Tampa. Here, exposure to the ethnic newspapers may have given respondents an agenda of issues for their discussions that differed from the mainstream news media agenda. Thus, the interpersonal communication of minority respondents may have conflicted with the coverage of issues in the mainstream news media.

In other words, while interpersonal communication levels may have been similar for whites and minorities in Tampa, the issues that they were discussing may have differed because of differences in exposure levels to the minority media in the area.

While race appears to play a very minor role in the agenda-setting process, it should be noted that differences were found between minorities and whites for some individual issues. As noted earlier, lack of morality did not even appear on the minorities' agendas at either site of the study, but did appear on the agenda for the white populations in both Tampa and Eugene. Drug abuse ranked fifth on the agenda for minorities in Eugene. Civil rights was mentioned as an important problem only by minorities in Tampa.

The reasons for these differences are not clear. Herein lies an area that appears to be fruitful for future research: examinations of individual issues across different racial groups. Research may investigate, for example, why drug abuse appeared high on the issue agenda for minorities in a city that has a relatively low crime rate. Possibly, media coverage patterns gave Eugene residents some indications -- perhaps implicit and unintended -- that the drug issue is a problem only among minorities. Drug arrest stories in Oregon may have noted that the suspects hailed from out of state and were not representative of the mostly white Oregon population. Thus, while the drug issue receives relatively little coverage in Eugene because of the low crime rate there, when drug stories do appear, the stories may be often framed as a problem facing only the minority population. Thus, the stories may be framed as an issue that is outside the realm of experience for whites in the area.

How stories are framed, then, may be an important variable in the agenda-setting process of different demographic groups and should be investigated in the future. Other message variables also may play some role in the agenda-setting process for minority groups.

On the other hand, exposure to news media outside the mainstream press also deserves further research attention. Civil rights in Tampa, for example, could be an indication again of minority newspaper usage. The minority newspapers there may emphasize conflict in their reporting of issues affecting different races. Thus, while minorities may pick up salience cues on civil rights as an important issue through the stories covered in the minority press, the white population in Tampa remains unexposed to this issue.

Finally, other variables that may influence the magnitude of agenda-setting effects should be examined at the individual level. While the most significant findings of the present study are the striking similarities between racial groups in agenda-setting, future studies should investigate other variables in an attempt to get a better understanding of the information processing involved in agenda-setting.

Table 1. Analysis of variance results comparing concern for issues receiving extensive coverage in the news media for whites and each minority group in the two sites of the study.

Tampa, Florida

	Mean for high-coverage issues	F-score	Prob.
Whites	12.20	0.966	.427
African-Americans	12.94		
Hispanics	11.87		
Asian-Americans	12.80		
Native Americans	13.00		

Eugene, Oregon

	Mean for high-coverage issues	T-value	Prob.
Whites	11.71	1.859	.117
African-Americans	11.54		
Hispanics	10.93		
Asian-Americans	11.06		
Native Americans	10.66		

Table 2. T-Test results comparing whites' and non-whites' levels of concern for issues receiving extensive coverage in the news media in the two sites of the study.

Tampa, Florida

	Mean for high-coverage issues	T-value	Prob.
Whites	12.20	-0.63	.533
Non-whites	12.39		

Eugene, Oregon

	Mean for high-coverage issues	T-value	Prob.
Whites	11.71	1.10	.277
Non-whites	11.34		

Table 3. T-Test results comparing whites' and non-whites' levels of concern for issues receiving little or no coverage in the news media in the two sites of the study.

Tampa, Florida

	Mean for low-coverage issues	**T-value**	**Prob.**
Non-whites	11.63	2.38	.02
Whites	10.71		

Eugene, Oregon

	Mean for low-coverage issues	**T-value**	**Prob.**
Non-whites	10.82	0.48	.631
Whites	10.63		

Table 4. Comparison of issue agendas for whites and non-white in the two sites of the study.

Tampa, Florida

Non-whites' agenda	**Whites' agenda**
1. Crime	1. Crime
2. Health care	2. Health care
3. Economy	3. Economy
4. (t) Poverty	4. Dissatisfaction with government
4. (t) Unemployment	5. Budget deficit
4. (t) Civil rights	6. Lack of morality
7. (t) Budget deficit	7. Poverty
7. (t) Dissatisfaction with government	8. (t) Unemployment
9. Social problems	8. (t)Social
problems	
10. (t) AIDS	10. (t) Education
10. (t) Drug abuse	10. (t) Drug abuse

Spearman rank-order correlation: r = .59; p = .021

Eugene, Oregon

Non-whites' agenda	**Whites' agenda**
1. Crime	1. Economy
2. Economy	2. Crime
3. Education	3. Education
4. International problems	4. Dissatisfaction with government
5. Drug abuse	5. Health care
6. Health care	6. International problems
7. (t) Dissatisfaction with government	7. Poverty
7. (t) Poverty	8. Lack of Morality
9. Budget deficit	9. Social problems
10. Social problems	10. Budget deficit
	11. Drug abuse

Spearman rank-order correlation: r = .60; p = .03

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News of Hurricane Andrew:
The Agenda of Sources and the Sources' Agendas

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Newspaper Coverage of Hurricane Andrew: The Agenda of Sources and Sources' Agendas

Agenda-setting research typically views journalists and sources in adversarial relations.[1] But a recent series of studies of investigative reporting, grounded in "agenda-building," reported that journalists and their political sources often form "strategic alliances" to report the news.[2] Some critics contend that influential sources in government and those with financial clout exert inordinate power to shape the news agenda.[3] Evidence of the strikinging similar reliance of news sources from the power structure to comment on and interpret "media events" has led researchers to posit an "elite model," in which a close knit group of insiders define key national issues.[4]

This study examined the news sources quoted in four mainstream U.S. newspapers pertaining to a major natural disaster: Hurricane Andrew, which ravaged South Florida and sections of Louisiana during August 1992. The newspapers were in communities that had varying degrees of devastation, from none to heavy. The purpose was to investigate whether source quotation became more diversified and carried citizen opinions when the story had a local impact.

After every natural disaster, sources try to frame the news.[5] As a recent study of natural disasters noted, in addition to the journalists "another significant power behind the news is wielded by the journalists' sources, who originate much of what appears on the airwaves, as well as the pages of newspapers."[6]

Among news sources, local politicians are quick to grasp the political significance of a disaster. They recognize that media coverage can affect their political careers because "natural disasters offer citizens the chance to scrutinize the character and capacity of elected leaders. An everyday local politician can take on a larger-than-life dimension, whether as hero or hapless victim, as reporters spin their stories of crisis and response."[7]

There is reason to suspect that community news media might carry more citizen sources than national media. Brown and her colleagues analyzed the sources quoted in The New York Times, The Washington Post, and four North Carolina newspapers.[8] The North Carolina newspapers were more likely than the national newspapers to quote "unaffiliated" individuals. "On the whole," the authors wrote, "stories in the local papers seem to best meet the basic expectations of a pluralistic medium."[9] In a replication of the Brown study, Berkowitz reported that local news programs carried more individuals as news sources than the network newscasts.[10]

This study investigated the following questions concerning newspaper coverage of Hurricane Andrew: (a) did newspapers quote sources in business and government more than "unaffiliated" individuals? (b) were sources quoted about topics related to their expertise and personal concerns? (c) did sources engage in self-praise? (d) did sources assign blame to others? and (e) what differences, if any, were there in national and community newspaper coverage?

Analyzing Disaster News

The unit of analysis was the "direct quotation," defined as a speaker's words inside quotation marks. When source attribution set off direct quotation, the quoted material before and after the attribution was treated as a continuous quotation. This allowed the same source to be coded multiple times in a story, reflecting the source's potential influence in story interpretation. Each direct quotation was coded for: (a) locale, (b) source, (c) topic, (d) praise, and (e) blame.[11]

Striking quotations attract attention. Kate Hale, the Dade County (Fla.) administrator of emergency operations, became a community hero for criticizing the slow federal response. Her most widely reported quotation was "Where the hell is the cavalry?"[12]. In response to criticisms from Hale and other Florida officials, President Bush issued his famous "blame game" quotation: "I am not going to participate in the blame game."[13]

Two national newspapers were examined--The New York Times (late edition) and The Washington Post (final edition). Two community newspapers, in areas where Andrew struck, were also examined--The Miami Herald (final edition) and The Times-Picayune of New Orleans (Metro edition). The hurricane ravaged several communities south of Miami, leaving Fifteen dead and 250,000 homeless. The Times-Picayune serves an area that averted calamity. Andrew's eye swiped Louisiana's sparsely populated marshy coast 90 miles from New Orleans.

Nimmo and Combs suggested analysis of disaster news from disaster onset to when the event fails to receive continuous coverage.[14] The analysis commenced August 25, 1992, the first full day after Andrew hit South Florida, and concluded September 8 because the next day one of the national newspapers in this study, The Post, did not carry a front-page story about Andrew, suggesting that the story was no longer of sustained national interest. All news stories about Andrew were examined.

The locale referred to the quotation in relation to Hurricane Andrew. If the quotation originated from a source in the hurricane-affected areas of Florida or Louisiana, the locale was coded as "local." If it originated in Florida or Louisiana's capitals or elsewhere in these states, it was "state." If it originated elsewhere in the United States, it was "national."[15]

The four newspapers carried 1,105 hurricane stories during the 15-day period. The Miami Herald contained the majority (n=708, 64.1%). The Times-Picayune of New Orleans carried 219 stories. The two national newspapers each carried fewer than 100 stories (The Times, n=97; The Post, n=81).

The analysis yielded 5,726 direct quotations: 3,515 in The Herald, 921 in The Times-Picayune, 679 in The Times, and 611 in The Post. More than 95% of the quotations in The Herald, The Times, and The Post originated from staff reports. By contrast, almost 30% of the quotations in The Times-Picayune appeared in wire service stories. The vast majority of the quotations in the national newspapers appeared in the front sections (85.1% in The Times and 85.6% in The Post), compared to slimmer majorities in The Herald (59.8%) and The Times-Picayune (54.9%).

The Herald carried more quotations with local locales (90.8%) than The Times-Picayune (78.3%), The Times (76.7%), and The Post (77.1%). Almost one-fifth of the quotations in the two national dailies were from stories with national locales (19.3% in The Times and 18.5% in The Post), mostly Washington, D.C.

Sources and Topics of News Coverage

The analysis focused on the seven most quoted sources, accounting for about 65% of the sources. These sources were unaffiliated individuals, n=1,837, 32%; state and local government officials, n=660, 11.5%; business sources, n=356, 6.2%; military sources, n=226, 3.9%; health sources, n=226, 3.9%; scientists, n=207, 3.6%; and volunteers, n=203, 3.5%.[16] Similarly, the seven most prominent topics were examined, accounting for almost 75% of the topics. The topics were disaster and suffering, n=1,369, 23.9%; assistance and coordination, n=1,326;, 23.2%; general comments, n=390, 6.8%; unrelated comments, n=293, 5.1%; injuries, stress and death, n=288, 5%; economic matters, n=272, 4.8%; and guidance, n=254, 4.4%.[17]

Table 1 reports the topics of quotations in the national and community newspapers. When chi-square tests indicated significant ($p < .001$) differences in both the national and community newspapers, difference of proportions tests (Z-tests) were computed to determine which topics were associated with specific sources (at $p < .001$). Examples of direct quotations are provided to illustrate the findings. In Table 1, all topics by sources in national and community newspapers were significantly different except for state and local officials.

Table 1 Goes About Here

Table 1 indicates that unaffiliated individuals were more likely than the other sources to be quoted regarding descriptions of disaster and suffering. More than 42% of the 1,489 quotations by individuals in the community newspapers and almost half of the 428 quotations attributed to individuals in the national newspapers concerned descriptions of disaster and suffering.

Herald stories with headlines such as "Amid Wreckage, Survivors Tell Their Stories" and "Night of Anguish" were essentially collections of graphic descriptions and suffering: "I've never been so scared in my life"; "We got slaughtered over here"; "My sliding glass doors were bending inward"; and "My car overturned, and the wind pushed it through my French doors and into my livingroom."[18] One storm victim, apparently aware of the press' preoccupation in "human interest," held up a knapsack and a can of beer before the Washington Post reporter and said: "This is all I have left. This is human interest!"[19]

Individuals in both the community and national newspapers were frequently quoted pleading for help (assistance and coordination). Those quoted in community newspapers were more likely than the other sources to be quoted regarding general and unrelated comments and less likely to offer guidance. Individuals quoted in the national newspapers were less likely than the other sources to discuss economic topics.

As expected, business sources were more likely than the other sources to be quoted about economic topics related to the hurricane. Their focus on the economic perspective sometimes led them to comment on the positive economic repercussions, as when the president of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce said, "It's [Hurricane Andrew] going to lift us out of recession. I think everybody's going to be able to find something to do."[20]

An unexpected finding of business sources quoted in the community newspapers, particularly in The Herald, was to provide guidance to victims. These guidance quotations were frequently in the newspapers' lifestyle sections. The headlines of these self-help stories illustrated how local business "experts" gave coping advice: "Give Rugs, Appliances a Chance to Dry Out"; "Quick Fix for Roof is Handy But Hazardous"; "Shock Your Pool to Keep Water Clean for Now"; "After Storm, Give Wounded trees TLC"; "How Do You Separate Reputable Contractors From Scam Artists."

In both the national and community newspapers, more than half the quotations by military sources referred to assistance and coordination. Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, for example, described the military's assistance and coordination shortly after President Bush ordered troops to Florida: "We can do things that nobody else can do, and it's an activity we're happy to do--the troops enjoy it."[21]

Health workers were more likely than the other sources to be quoted about injuries, stress, and death. Those quoted in the community newspapers were less likely to be quoted regarding descriptions of disaster and suffering. The community newspapers also carried guidance quotations from health workers which typically dealt with stress.

Quotations by scientists indicated that they were more likely than the other sources to be quoted about "other" topics, particularly scientific explanations and facts dealing with the hurricane, which were not major topics of overall news coverage. In the community newspapers, scientific sources were also more likely to be quoted about guidance. For example, the director of the Florida Solar Energy Center in Cape Canaveral, described as a specialist in human comfort, provided guidance about sleeping outdoors: "Sleep in your hammock so that your whole body is exposed to air on all sides."[22]

Volunteers were more likely than the other sources to be quoted about assistance and coordination--precisely what volunteers do. For example, a Red Cross official in New Orleans said, "We believe in the American people and we will raise those dollars. They have come through for us over and over again."[23]

Table 2 reports when sources assigned blame. Only about one-quarter of the quotations (n=1,384) assigned blame. The analysis included the five blame categories that each accounted for 3.6% or more of the quotations: nature, the federal government, individuals, contractors, and government in general.[24]

Table 2 Goes About Here

Only two sources, individuals and state and local officials, met the a priori criteria for significance. Individuals quoted in the national and community newspapers were less likely than other sources to blame federal officials and contractors. More than 80% of the individuals in the community newspapers blamed the most obvious source--nature. These quotations were, by and large, descriptions of suffering and disaster.

State and local officials quoted in the national and community newspapers were more likely than the other sources to blame federal agencies and officials. Florida Governor Lawton Chiles, a Democrat, ridiculed President Bush's first visit to South Florida as a presidential election-year gimmick: "He went to South Miami and looked at a downed tree."[25]

The election was only three months away, and Florida was considered a pivotal state to Bush's re-election. In an election-year blunder, White House officials defended their delayed response to the disaster, claiming that Chiles did not formally request federal assistance. Chiles responded to the White House's charges: "I didn't think it was necessary."[26]

Kate Hale, not known for discretion, described the administration's assertion that procedures were not followed as "patently a lie." When the White House tried to assuage the situation by suggesting that there was a "communications problem" between federal and state agencies, Hale countered: "There isn't any communications problem unless people have earplugs."[27]

While state and local government officials lambasted the White House and federal officials, federal officials responded gingerly to these criticisms. Some federal officials defended their besieged agencies by criticizing the press coverage. The associate director of F.E.M.A. (Federal Emergency Management Agency), which endured repeated censure from state and local officials, vented his rage at a New York Times reporter: "F.E.M.A.'s doing just great, despite what your newspaper is reporting."[28] Bush publicly berated reporters for reporting that his actions were politically motivated: "This may be hard for you to believe. I am thinking about what's good for the people here. I don't even think about the politics of it."[29]

The debates between federal and state and local officials in Florida did not transpire in Louisiana. Democratic Governor Edwin Edwards praised the government's response: "We could not ask for better, more compassionate treatment."[30] Likewise, Louisiana's deputy assistant director of Emergency Preparedness declared himself "absolutely pleased" with Bush's response.[31]

Table 3 reports the quotations assigning praise. Less than 20% of the quotations (n=1,040) included praise. The praise quotations included the following categories: individuals (n=325); the federal government (n=143); businesses (n =108); volunteers (n=100); state and local government officials (n=76); and the military (n=60).[32]

Tables 3 Goes About Here

Individuals quoted in both the national and community newspapers were less likely than the other sources to praise the federal government. Those quoted in the community newspapers were also less likely to praise state and local officials.

A consistent theme in the news coverage was the "self-praise phenomenon." Individuals quoted in the community newspapers were more likely than the other sources to praise fellow individuals, by about a 2-to-1 ratio. This ratio of self-praise was far less than that by state and local officials, business sources, military sources, and volunteers. Individuals praised other individuals for assisting each other in time of need. Typical of such quotations was a Miami man who got to know his neighbors: "There must have been 30 people working here, everybody smiling like they were in a picnic."[33]

State and local government officials engaged in self praise. Those quoted in the national newspapers were 17 times more likely to praise state and local officials than the other sources. State and local officials quoted in the community newspapers were nine times more likely to praise state and local officials than other sources. The comment by Florida's lieutenant general in charge of relief operations was typical: "We will do whatever it takes. This is our business, to come in with a large amount of material and people and set up an infrastructure."[34]

Business sources also engaged in self-praise. In the national newspapers, there was a 38-to-1 ratio of self-praise by business sources; in the community newspapers, the ratio was almost 24 to 1. A Herald story with numerous self-praise quotations by business sources was headlined, "Workers' Needs Are Top Concern for Companies." The vice president of public relations of the Bloomingdale's department store chain lauded the company's concern for the South Florida community and its employees: "Miami will rebuild and so will we. We're telling them (Bloomingdale's employees) that they are still employed."[35] In another story, a bank executive lauded his bank's decisions to extend grace on mortgage payments, offer immediate short-term loans, and provide mobile bank units: "The people who are really affected and need help, we're going to do a lot for them."[36]

Military officials heaped 16 times more praise on the military than the other sources. In the community newspapers, the ratio was almost 45 to one! Typical of the self-praise was a quotation by a military spokesman after federal troops arrived in South Florida: "They (the troops) will go out into the community to each block and neighborhood so they can put their arms around people and tell them it's O.K."[37]

Volunteers were also more likely to praise volunteers than the other sources--by an 11-to-1 ratio in the national newspapers and 4-to-1 ratio in the community newspapers. The Herald, for example, quoted the head of United Way in a nearby county describing how his chapter was assisting storm victims: "We're doing everything we can to help our neighbors up north."[38]

Patterns of Source Influence

This study of newspaper coverage of Hurricane Andrew examined whether newspapers quoted sources in business and government more than "unaffiliated" individuals. It also examined whether sources directed coverage to certain topics and statements of praise and blame. Perhaps surprisingly, individuals were the most quoted source. This finding would tend to refute the belief that sources in business in industry receive the lion's share of coverage.

Quantity of quotations, however, is not the sole indicator of source interpretation of the news. Most of the major news sources exerted influence on news interpretation by being quoted regarding topics related to their "expertise." Military officials and volunteers were quoted about assistance and coordination. Business sources were quoted about economic topics. Health workers were quoted about injuries, stress, and death. Individuals' "expertise" was as suffering victims. Their heart-rending quotations, combined with often graphic descriptions of disaster, provided a human angle to the disaster.

While praise and blame statements were infrequent, when they occurred most sources praised themselves and blamed others. Individuals, however, offered fewer self-praise quotations than other sources. Individuals were also less likely to blame federal government inaction than other sources. Instead, individuals blamed nature--the most obvious and least controversial source. Ostensibly, at least, the over-arching message from quoted individuals was helplessness.

State and local government officials in hard-hit Florida repeatedly blamed federal officials and agencies for failing to respond to the catastrophe. It made sense that the community newspapers would carry the quotations of state and local officials. But the national newspapers also gave considerable coverage to state and local officials. Further, while state and local officials received considerable news coverage, federal officials did not emerge as "major" news sources to respond to the charges lodged against them.

Federal officials, were cautious in assigning blame. President Bush, in particular, strived to be delicate in criticizing state and local officials in Florida, perhaps because state and local officials presented themselves as defenders of suffering victims. Bush was involved in a presidential campaign in which Florida was a key state.[39] Florida officials might have exploited Bush's political weakness to commit the federal government to pay for 100% of the clean-up.

A central question in this study concerned what differences, if any, there were in national and community newspaper coverage of Hurricane Andrew. Though one might be tempted to portray the national newspapers in this study as distant from the disaster and reliant on White House and federal government sources in Washington, D.C., the two national newspapers also gave considerable coverage to storm victims and state and local officials in datelined stories from disaster areas.

While the community newspapers gave minimal coverage to national locales, the national newspapers gave ample opportunity to the White House and federal officials to report their interpretations of Hurricane Andrew. Why then were White House and federal sources so ineffective in telling their stories?

Despite the "authoritativeness" of White House and federal agency sources and their access to the press, press attention to suffering storm victims constrained federal government and White House sources to interpret the news. The countervailing power of citizen sources was not that they were refuting what federal government sources were saying. Rather, the "power" of individuals quoted in the news was that their pleas had to be considered in the political context of disaster.

TABLE 1
Topics of Quotations by Sources

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a. Source: Individuals

	National (n = 1290)			Community (n = 4436)		
	Individuals	Others	Z	Individuals	Others	Z
Description	49.1%	15.7%	12.76*	42.2%	14.2%	20.88*
Assistance	15.2	29.5	5.60*	16.9	25.4	6.42*
General	10.3	5.6	3.08	10.6	5.0	7.01*
Unrelated	2.1	2.2	0.12	9.0	4.6	5.83*
Injuries	7.8	6.0	1.16	4.3	4.7	0.61
Economic	0.5	7.1	5.17*	0.1	6.9	0.19
Guidance	0.0	0.9	1.97	0.3	8.0	10.71*
Others	15.2	33.3	6.87*	16.6	31.3	6.66*
n =	428	862		1489	3027	

b. Source: Business

	National (n = 1290)			Community (n = 4436)		
	Business	Others	Z	Business	Others	Z
Description	26.2%	26.8%	0.13	13.2%	24.5%	5.90*
Assistance	14.6	25.6	2.48	19.7	23.1	1.79
General	6.8	7.0	0.08	3.8	7.2	2.98
Unrelated	1.9	2.2	0.20	3.4	6.3	2.70
Injuries	0.0	7.2	2.82	0.7	5.1	4.65*
Economic	22.3	3.4	8.52*	26.2	1.6	25.67*
Guidance	2.9	0.4	3.15	17.5	3.8	13.22*
Others	25.2	27.5	0.50	15.5	28.2	6.23*
n =	103	1187		554	3882	

c. Source: Military

	National (n = 1290)			Community (n = 4436)		
	Military	Others	Z	Military	Others	Z
Description	12.7%	27.5%	2.59	13.5%	23.4%	2.95
Assistance	55.6	23.1	5.83*	57.7	21.4	10.85*
General	7.9	6.9	0.30	3.7	6.9	1.59
Unrelated	1.6	2.2	0.32	3.1	6.1	1.59
Injuries	1.6	6.8	1.68	1.8	4.7	1.74
Economic	0.0	5.1	1.84	0.0	4.9	2.90
Guidance	0.0	0.7	0.67	0.0	5.8	3.16
Others	20.6	27.6	1.21	20.2	26.9	1.90
n =	63	1227		163	4273	

d. Source: Health

	National (n = 1290)			Community (n = 4436)		
	Health	Others	Z	Health	Others	Z
Description	21.6%	26.9%	0.72	8.5%	23.7%	4.85*
Assistance	10.8	25.1	1.99	13.2	23.1	3.18
General	0.0	7.2	1.69	2.1	7.0	2.62
Unrelated	0.0	2.2	0.91	5.3	6.0	0.40
Injuries	59.5	5.0	13.09*	34.4	3.2	20.18*
Economic	0.0	5.0	1.39	0.5	4.9	2.79
Guidance	0.0	0.6	0.47	24.3	4.7	11.53*
Others	8.1	27.9	2.66	11.6	27.3	4.78*
n =	37	1253		189	4247	

e. Source: Scientists

	National (n = 1290)			Community (n = 4436)		
	Scientists	Others	Z	Scientists	Others	Z
Description	13.9%	27.5%	2.18	8.9%	23.5%	3.97*
Assistance	4.2	25.9	4.15*	2.2	23.3	5.77*
General	4.2	7.1	0.94	4.4	6.8	1.10
Unrelated	5.6	2.0	2.02	3.0	6.1	1.49
Injuries	0.0	7.0	2.32	0.0	4.7	2.58
Economic	1.4	5.1	1.41	0.0	4.9	2.64
Guidance	0.0	0.7	0.71	15.6	5.2	5.21*
Others	70.8	24.7	8.53*	65.9	25.4	10.48*
n =	72	1218		135	4301	

f. Source: Volunteers

	National (n = 1290)			Community (n = 4436)		
	Volunteers	Others	Z	Volunteers	Others	Z
Description	15.3%	27.3%	2.03	4.9%	23.7%	5.27*
Assistance	72.9	22.4	8.79*	68.1	21.2	13.21*
General	1.7	7.2	1.62	5.6	6.8	0.56
Unrelated	0.0	2.3	1.18	0.7	6.2	2.73
Injuries	3.4	6.7	1.00	5.6	4.5	0.62
Economic	0.0	5.1	1.78	1.4	4.8	1.87
Guidance	0.0	0.6	0.60	0.0	5.7	2.95
Others	6.8	28.3	3.62*	13.9	27.1	3.52*
n =	59	1231		144	4292	

* = p < .001. Chi squares are with 7 degrees of freedom

TABLE 2
Quotations Asserting Blame by Sources

a. Source: Individuals

	National (n = 368)			Community (n = 1016)		
	Individuals	Others	Z	Individuals	Others	Z
Nature	53.2%	38.3%	2.65	83.4%	61.3%	7.55*
Fed. Govt.	9.7	23.4	3.40*	1.7	8.7	4.65*
Individuals	16.2	6.5	2.99	6.4	4.3	1.49
Contractors	0.6	9.3	3.56*	1.2	7.9	4.79*
Government	5.8	3.7	0.95	2.4	5.3	2.28
Others	14.3	18.7	1.11	4.9	12.5	4.06*
n =	154	214		409	607	

b. Source: State and Local Officials

	National (n = 368)			Community (n = 1016)		
	St & Loc	Others	Z	St & Loc	Others	Z
Nature	35.9%	45.6%	1.15	38.9%	74.8%	8.38*
Fed. Govt.	51.3	13.7	5.82*	28.2	2.6	11.61*
Individuals	2.6	11.6	1.72	3.1	5.4	1.12
Contractor	2.6	6.1	0.89	7.6	4.9	1.29
Government	2.6	4.9	0.64	9.2	3.4	3.11
Others	5.1	18.2	2.07	13.0	8.9	1.50
n =	39	329		131	885	

* = p < .001. Chi squares are with 4 degrees of freedom

TABLE 3
Quotations Asserting Praise by Sources

a. Source: Individuals

	National (n = 241)			Community (n = 799)		
	Individuals	Others	Z	Individuals	Others	Z
Individual	39.5%	17.2%	3.11	52.7%	28.9%	5.98*
Fed. Govt.	2.6	36.0	5.27*	1.6	10.8	3.91*
Business	0.0	11.3	2.18	4.8	12.4	2.95
Volunteers	15.8	9.4	1.19	14.5	7.8	2.75
St. and Local	0.0	5.4	1.47	2.7	13.1	4.02*
Military	10.5	5.9	1.05	3.8	6.0	1.15
Others	31.6	14.8	2.50	19.9	21.0	0.32
n =	38	203		186	613	

b. Source: State and Local Officials

	National (n = 241)			Community (n = 799)		
	St & Loc	Others	Z	St & Loc	Others	Z
Individual	8.7%	22.0%	1.50	29.6%	35.1%	1.07
Fed. Govt.	30.4	30.7	0.02	9.2	8.6	0.20
Business	8.7	9.6	0.14	1.0	12.0	3.31*
Volunteers	8.7	10.6	0.28	1.0	10.6	3.05
St. and Local	30.4	1.8	6.27*	48.0	5.4	12.82*
Military	0.0	7.3	1.34	4.1	5.7	0.65
Others	13.0	17.9	0.59	7.1	22.7	3.56*
n =	23	218		98	701	

c. Source: Business

	National (n = 241)			Community (n = 799)		
	Business	Others	Z	Business	Others	Z
Individual	11.5%	21.9%	1.23	21.7%	36.5%	3.09
Fed. Govt.	3.8	34.0	3.15	0.0	10.1	3.56*
Business	73.1	1.9	11.65*	59.1	2.5	18.21*
Volunteers	3.8	11.2	1.17	2.6	10.5	2.69
St. and Local	0.0	5.1	1.18	0.9	12.3	3.67*
Military	0.0	7.4	1.44	0.0	6.4	2.79
Others	7.7	18.6	1.38	15.7	21.6	1.44
n =	26	215		115	684	

d. Source: Military

	National (n = 241)			Community (n = 799)		
	Military	Others	Z	Military	Others	Z
Individual	0.0%	21.7%	1.74	19.5%	35.2	2.06
Fed. Govt.	36.4	30.4	0.42	0.0	9.1	2.02
Business	0.0	10.0	1.10	0.0	11.2	2.27
Volunteers	0.0	10.9	1.16	4.9	9.6	1.01
St. and Local	0.0	4.8	0.74	0.0	11.2	2.27
Military	63.6	3.9	7.78*	75.6	1.7	20.23*
Others	0.0	18.3	1.56	0.0	21.9	3.37*
n =	11	230		41	758	

e. Source: Volunteers

	National (n = 241)			Community (n = 799)		
	Volunteers	Others	Z	Volunteers	Others	Z
Individual	41.7%	18.4%	2.67	55.9%	32.7%	3.61*
Fed. Govt.	0.0	34.1	3.44*	0.0	9.3	2.45
Business	0.0	10.6	1.68	5.1	11.1	1.43
Volunteers	58.3	5.1	8.10*	33.9	7.4	6.73*
St. and Local	0.0	5.1	1.13	0.0	11.5	2.76
Military	0.0	7.4	1.38	0.0	5.9	1.92
Others	0.0	19.4	2.38	5.1	22.0	3.08
n =	24	217		59	740	

Note: * = p < .001. Chi squares are with 6 degrees of freedom

Footnotes

1. Jack M. McLeod, "For the Affirmative," Political Communication 10 (1993):16-27.

2. David L. Protess, Fay Lomax Cook, Jack C. Doppelt, James S. Ettema, Margaret T., Gordon, Donna R. Leff, and Peter Miller, The Journalism of Outrage: Investigative Reporting and Agenda Building in America (New York: The Guilford Press, 1991), 250.

3. Robert A. Hackett, "A Hierarchy of Access: Aspects of Source Bias in Canadian TV News," Journlaism Quarterly 62 (Summer 1985):257-277; Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., Beyond Agenda Setting: Information Subsidies and Public Policy (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1982); Montague Kern, Patricia W. Levering, and Ralph B. Levering, The Kennedy Crises: The Press, the Presidency and Foreign Policy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

4. Stephen D. Reese, August Grant and Lucig H. Danielian, "The Structure of News Sources on Television: A Network Analysis of 'CBS News,' 'Nightline,' 'MacNeil/Lehrer,' and 'This Week with David Brinkley'." Journal of Communication 44 (Spring 1994):84-107.

5. Susanna Hornig, (1989). "News Frames and the Nature of Truth: The Effects of Quotation Use and Controversy in Stories about Science," Southwestern Mass Communication Journal 5(2) (1989):41-49; Susanna Hornig, Lynne Walters and Julia Templin, "Voices in the News: Newspaper Coverage of Hurricane Hugo and the Loma Prieta Earthquake," Newspaper Research Journal 12(3)

(1991):32-45; Karen S. Johnson-Cartee, Bryan A. Graham and Deborah Foster, "Siting a Hazardous Waste Incinerator: Newspaper Risk Communication and Public Opinion Analysis," Newspaper Research Journal 13/14(4/1) (1992-1993):60-72; Sue O'Brien, "Disasters and the Making of Political Careers," in Lee Wilkins and Philip Patterson, eds., Risky Business: Communicating Issues of Science, Risk, and Public Policy (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 177-196.

6. Lynne Masel Walters and Susanna Horning, "Faces in the News: Network Television Coverage of Hurricane Hugo and the Loma Prieta Earthquake," Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media (1993) 37:219-232, 220.

7. Sue O'Brien (1991). "Disasters and the Making of Political Careers," in Risky Business: Communicating Issues of Science, Risk, and Public Policy, eds., Lee Wilkins and Philip Patterson (New York: Greenwood Press), 177.

8. Jane Delano Brown, Carl R. Bybee, Stanley T. Weardon and Dulcie Murdock Straughan, "Invisible Power: Newspaper News Sources and the Limits of Diversity," Journalism Quarterly, 64 (1987):45-54.

9. Brown, Bybee, Weardon and Straughan, 49.

10. Dan Berkowitz, "Television News Sources and News Channels: A Study in Agenda-Building," Journalism Quarterly 64 (1987):508-513.

11. Since there were so many categories of sources and topics and assertions of praise and blame, the definitions of the

major categories will be presented with the findings. A random sample of 25 stories was re-coded from each of the four newspapers. Excluding the variables of date, paper, and page, which would have inflated reliability, the coders were in agreement 88.5% of the time. In cases of disagreement, the researcher was the final arbiter. Each coder also re-coded 12 randomly selected stories to test for intra-coder agreement. With both coders, intra-coder agreement exceeded 94%.

12. "Dade Disaster Chief a Hero, a Thorn," The Miami Herald, 31 August 1992, 17A.

13. "Troops Arrive with Aid in Ravaged South Florida," The Washington Post, 29 August 1992, 1A.

14. Dan Nimmo and James E. Combs, Nightly Horrors: Crisis Coverage by Television Network News (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985).

15. A small number of quotations (n=23) that dealt with expressions of regret and offers of assistance from foreign governments was coded as "international." The category of "state" referred to cities in the states outside the affected areas. For the most part, however, the category referred to the state capitals, neither of which was in areas affected by the hurricane.

16. The definitions of the major sources were as follows: (1) Individuals, which included "average people" such as hurricane victims and homeowners. While these people might have been identified in passing by their jobs or professions, they were

quoted primarily as individuals. Some studies have referred to such sources as "unaffiliated" citizens, to distinguish them from individuals associated with business, politics, organizations, and so forth. Berkowitz and Beach; Brown et. al.; (2) State and local officials referred to officials elected or appointed to office in state or local government. This category excluded salaried city workers; (3) Business people, which included people in commerce and enterprise, ranged from store owners to executives in large corporations. This category excluded sources in non-profit organizations (coded as volunteers); (4) Military officials included sources in the U.S. armed forces; (5) Medical and health workers included people in health services such as doctors, nurses, and medics; (6) Scientists included sources in the "hard sciences" from industries, universities and elsewhere, but excluded people in medicine and the social sciences; (7) Volunteers included people working for charitable organizations and self-styled volunteer organizations.

17. The definitions of the major topics were as follows: (1) Descriptions of disaster and suffering, which involved accounts of hardship and scenes of destruction; (2) Assistance and coordination, which included reports of giving, requesting, or receiving aid as well as organizational and clean-up activities; (3) General comments, which included quotations pertaining to the hurricane of a broad or sweeping nature; (4) Unrelated comments, which referred to quotations in stories about the hurricane that veered off the topic of the hurricane; (5) Injuries, stress and

death, which included quotations about death, physical or potential harm to self or others, and specific mentions to psychological strain or tension; (6) economic matters, which concerned economic repercussions of the hurricane; (7) Guidance, in which the source offered explicit advice or guidance for coping with the hurricane. If a direct quotation involved more than one topic, to keep the categories mutually exclusive such quotations were coded as multiple topics. Only 77 (1.3%) of the direct quotations were coded as multiple topics.

18. "Night of Anguish," The Miami Herald, 25 August 1992, 5A.

19. "Mystery for Many Hurricane Owners Afloat: "Where's My Boat?" The Washington Post, 26 August 1992, 25A.

20. "Andrew's Silver Lining," The Washington Post, 30 August 1992, 1C.

21. "Military Welcomes Mission of Mercy," The Miami Herald, 8 September 1992, 17A.

22. "How to Keep Cool While Power is Off," The Miami Herald, 6 September 1992, 7G.

23. "Disasters May be Boost for Red Cross," The Times-Picayune, 29 August 1992, 1A.

24. Another study that examined "blaming" reported that 66% of the attributions assigned blame. See Walters and Horning, 1993. This discrepancy might have been due to Walters and Hornig's analysis of "interview segments" in network news stories. An entire interview segment might include the equivalent

of numerous direct quotations in a newspaper story, increasing the likelihood of finding blame attribution in each unit of analysis. The definitions of the blame statements were as follows: (1) Nature (n=877), referring to blame attributed to natural causes and so-called "acts of God," especially the hurricane itself and related meteorological phenomena such as rain, wind and tornadoes; (2) The federal government (n=125), referring to specific government officials and agencies, but excluding the president, which was a category by itself; (3) Individuals (n=91), referring to "unaffiliated" citizen sources such as homeowners, neighbors, storm victims, and the like for their actions or inactions; (4) Contractors, (n=74), referring to individuals and firms involved in home and business construction; (5) Government in general without specific references to the local, state, or federal levels (n=59).

25. "President Pledges Money to Rebuild South Florida," The New York Times, 2 September 1992, 1A.

26. "Troops Arrive with Aid in Ravaged South Florida," The Washington Post, 29 August 1992, 1A.

27. "'More Destruction than Any Disaster' ever in America," The Miami Herald, August 28 1992, 1A.

28. "Snarl of Red Tape Keeps U.S. Checks from Storm Areas," The New York Times, 6 September 1992, 1A.

29. "Bush to Increase Help to Florida," The Miami Herald, 30 August 1992, 22A.

30. "Bush Inspects La. Damage, 'It Shows that I Care'," The Times-Picayune, 27 August 1992, A14.

31. "Federal Aid Will Cut La. Storm Costs," The Times-Picayune, 7 September 1992, 1A.

32. The categories were operationalized in previous measures.

33. "At Long Last, Neighbors," The Miami Herald, 3 September 1992, 1F.

34. The Miami Herald, 28 August 1992.

35. "Workers' Needs are Top Concern for Companies," The Miami Herald, 27 August 1992, 1C.

36. "Lenders Promise Relief on Mortgage Payments," The Miami Herald, 6 September 1992, 1G.

37. "Tents Up, but Few Eager to Move in," The Miami Herald, 5 September 1992, 1A.

38. "Keys Offer Help to Storm Victims," The Miami Herald, 31 August 1992, 9C.

39. Bush narrowly won in Florida. This was a pyrrhic victory, since Bush considered Florida one of his home states.

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Being Informed and Feeling Informed:
The "Assurance Function" of the Mass Media

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Being Informed and Feeling Informed:
The "Assurance Function" of the Mass Media

Despite the central role attributed to the news media in a democratic society, public knowledge about even some of the most publicized issues is often astonishingly low (Bogart, 1989; Hyman & Sheatsley, 1947; Markle Commission, 1989). Television receives the brunt of the blame for the uninformed public (Levy, 1992; Manheim, 1976; Patterson, 1980; Patterson & McClure, 1976; Robinson & Davis, 1990). Others blame media content (Bagdikian, 1985) and formats (Altheide, 1985). While research indicates that newspaper reading and public affairs knowledge are associated, the correlations are often only moderate (Clarke & Fredin, 1978; McLeod, Bybee, &, Durall, 1979; Robinson & Davis, 1990; Wade & Schramm, 1969). Another explanation for the uninformed public is that the sheer ubiquity of mass media might contribute to a public that feels sufficiently informed. This study investigated the relationships among feeling informed, media use and evaluations, and knowledge of public affairs.

Graber (1989) suggested a possible "assurance" function of the mass media, arguing that media exposure comforts people into thinking that they are in touch with the world beyond their observations:

> The media are [people's] eyes and ears to the world, their means of surveillance, which tell them about economic conditions, weather, sports, jobs, fashions, social and cultural events, health and science and the private lives of

> famous people. Being able to stay informed makes people feel secure, **whether or not they remember what they read or hear or see** [emphasis added]. . . . Reassurance is very important for people's peace of mind (Graber, 1989, p. 9).

Traditional democratic theory asserts that an informed and politically active electorate is a prerequisite for democracy (Sabine, 1952). Research, however, indicates that people's motives for keeping informed about current events are inconsistent with the lofty principles in traditional democratic theory. Although some research indicates that people are motivated to keep informed out of a sense of "duty" (McCombs & Poindexter, 1983) or interest in issues (Genova & Greenberg, 1979), the research overwhelming indicates that people value information for such less noble reasons as anticipated interpersonal communication (Atkin, 1973), diversion, and entertainment (Wright, 1959, 1960).

A media assurance function could have dysfunctional consequences. An electorate assured of its knowledge could be a crucial nexus in a controversial "elitist democratic theory." Elitist theory maintains that political elites set policy in a democracy, despite appearances of public participation by such "rubber stamp" methods as voting. The theory also posits a quiescent public feeling "informed enough" and confident in the democratic system. Elites do not desire active public participation in policy making, despite their admonitions to the contrary. They simply require "passive consent" from the governed for the right of elites to govern (Walker, 1966).

There is reason to suspect that the public evaluates television superior to newspapers as a source of assurance. Research consistently indicates that people identify television as their primary and most credible news source (Roper, 1993). Although researchers have questioned the validity of these findings from self-report data (Stempel, 1991), the fact that people view television more favorably than newspapers could have consequences.

Research indicates that people cope with the "information tide" quite well (Graber, 1988). They strategically glean and cull information from the media to feel adequately informed (Downs, 1957; Graber, 1988; Popkin, 1991). In recent years, news media have fashioned their products to facilitate ease of knowledge acquisition and satisfy people's appetites for entertainment and diversion. These attempts have not been without controversy. Some scholars and media critics decry television news as mere headline summaries (Diamond, 1991; Rosenberg, 1993) and bemoan the trend in newspapers to mimic the "McPaper" route of USA Today (Bagdikian, 1983; Logan, 1986; Prichard, 1987).

Despite mass communication researchers' preoccupation with media use as a correlate of public affairs knowledge, McGuire (1986) reported that relationships between media use and various outcomes, including knowledge acquisition, rarely explain more than 2 or 3% of the variance. Formal education is consistently the best predictor of public affairs knowledge, even after controlling for other variables (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1991; Gunter, 1984; Hyman et al, 1975; Wade & Schramm 1969; Robinson, 1967, 1974; Korzenny et al. 1987; Robinson & Davis, 1990; Robinson & Levy, 1986).

Hypotheses and research questions were tested that separately treated feeling assured and knowledge about current events in the news:

H1: Newspaper use will be correlated with knowledge about news events.

H2: Local and network television news use will each be correlated with feeling informed about news events.

RQ1: What variables predict knowledge about news events?

RQ2: What variables predict feeling assured about news events?

Method

A probability sample of 525 adults (age 18 and over) in Florida was interviewed by telephone during the evenings of April 22 to 25, 1993. The survey period was kept brief because respondents were questioned about issues in the news, which may fluctuate based on news coverage.[1]

The sample was 55% female. The median age category was 30-49. The race and ethnicity of the sample were within the 4.4% tolerance level of known population parameters. The sample was 82% White and 15% African-American, compared to 83.1% and 13.6%, respectively, in the population. The sample was 9% Hispanic, compared to 12.2% in the state (The World Almanac, 1993, p. 626).

Respondents were asked two open-ended questions measuring time spent watching television during a "typical day" and "yesterday." After converting the responses into minutes, median "typical" daily television viewing was two hours and thirty minutes and "yesterday" viewing was two hours. The two measures were highly correlated ($r=.77$, $p < .001$). The final measure of television viewing was the equally weighted grand mean of these two questions.

Respondents were also asked open-ended questions regarding days per week spent reading a daily newspaper and watching local and network television news. If respondents used the particular news media, they were then asked to evaluate the newspaper, local television news program, and network news program that they read or watched "most often" on a 4-point Likert-type scale, ranging from very good (+2) to very bad (-2).[2] All news media-use measures were high (local television median=5 days; newspapers=5 days; network television=4 days). Unlike the other media use measures, newspaper reading indicated a bi-modal distribution, with 47% claiming to read a newspaper everyday day and 33% reading either one day a week or not at all. All media evaluation measures were favorable (local television, mean=1.13, sd=.66; network television, mean=1.21, sd=.67; newspapers, mean=0.92, sd=.70).

Respondents were asked their knowledge about current news events. Survey researchers fear that respondents will not answer questions with correct and incorrect answers. But, like Delli Carpini and Ketter (1991), we found that once the survey was underway, few respondents terminated interviews during the knowledge questions (less than 1%). Knowledge questions were selected to represent "hard" and "soft" news; and state, national, and international news. Respondents were asked their "familiarity" with each news event. If they said they were familiar, they were then asked one or two related, open-ended knowledge questions. If they were unfamiliar with the item, they were assumed not to be knowledgeable about the item.

The questions were:

Waco: "Have you heard about a religious cult group that recently ended its standoff with government agents after cult members set their compound ablaze?" If the respondent said yes, he or she was then asked, "In what state was the standoff?" (Answer: Texas; accept Waco).

Baseball: "Have you heard about Florida's new professional baseball team?" If yes: "What is the name of the team? (Answer: Marlins). "What other U.S. state also got a professional baseball team this year?" (Answer: Colorado; accept Denver).

Health: "Have you heard about President Clinton's recently formed Task Force on health care?" If yes: "Who is heading the Task Force?" (Answer: Hillary Rodham Clinton; accept Mrs. Clinton or president's wife).

Movie: "Have you heard about a controversial movie currently playing that stars Robert Redford and Demi Moore?" If yes: "What is the name of the movie?" (Answer: Indecent Proposal).

Lozano: "Have you heard about a Miami police officer who is scheduled to come to trial soon in Florida, charged with killing an African-American motorcyclist?" If yes: "What is his name?" (Answer: William Lozano; accept Lozano).

NAFTA: "Have you heard about a proposed trade agreement involving the United States and two North American nations that is called the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA?" If yes: "What two countries is the agreement with?" (Answers: Mexico and Canada; record as many as respondent answers; if respondent mentions one country, ask if he or she knows the other).

Findings

Respondents' familiarity and knowledge with the news events are reported in Table 1. Over 50% of the respondents claimed familiarity with each of the six news events. Familiarity approached 100% with the Waco question. Knowledge levels, however, ranged from less than one-third correctly identifying the location of the professional baseball expansion team in Colorado to 93% correctly identifying the state in which cult leader David Koresh's Branch Davidians compound burned.[3] Percentages of correctly answered questions (ranging from 0-8) by individuals, also in Table 1, indicated a normally distributed, but flat (platykurtic), distribution with a mean 4.03 correct responses. Mean familiarity of items was 4.74 on a 0-6 scale.

Table 1 Goes About Here

Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their motives, derived from the research literature, for keeping abreast with the news. The questions were as follows:

Duty: (a) "I believe that it is important for me to keep myself informed by following the news": (b) "It doesn't matter whether I keep myself informed or not"; and (c) "I think that it is important for all people to keep themselves informed by following the news."

Conversational Utility: (a) "Keeping up with the news gives me something to talk about with my friends, family, and co-workers"; and (b) "I often discuss issues in the news with friends, relatives, or other people at work."

Assuredness: (a) "I feel that I am as well informed about issues in the news as I need be"; and (b) "Overall, I feel better informed about issues and events in the news than most people."

The seven motive items were subjected to an oblique rotation factor analysis specifying a minimum 1.0 eigenvalue, resulting in a three-factor solution. The items loaded as predicted on the factors at .70 or above, with no item higher than .20 on the other factors. The first factor accounted for 34% of the variance. The two other factors, conversational utility and assuredness, each accounted for 15% of the variance. The alpha reliability levels (Cronbach, 1951) were .70 for duty, .55 for conversational utility, and .37 for assuredness. The items that comprised duty and conversational utility were summed into equally weighted scales for further analysis. The assuredness items were not summed into a scale because of their low reliability.[4]

Cross-tabulation of the assuredness items suggested that part of the reason for the low reliability was that respondents who scored high on one item often scored low on the other, suggesting that while many respondents felt better informed than others, they also did not feel informed enough. This suggests that the two assuredness measures might have been measuring different aspects of assuredness. The first question suggested a "relative" measure of assuredness compared to others; the other indicated an "absolute" measure regardless of other people.

To determine whether the public perceived news events in the dimensions of "hard" and "soft" news, the knowledge items were also subjected to oblique rotation factor analysis. Six of the eight items clearly loaded on two factors that fell into "hard" news (the two NAFTA items and the health item) and "soft" news (the two baseball items and the movie item). The Lozano and Waco items did not distinctly fit into either factor, loading modestly high on both factors. The Waco item indicated a ceiling effect on knowledge. The Lozano item involved a much publicized event. Florida residents might have viewed the forthcoming trial both as a sensational event and a serious event, accounting for the item's common variance on both factors.[5]

The factor analysis was recomputed with the two confounding items removed. The recomputed two-factor solution indicated clear evidence for the hard news-soft news dichotomy. Factor loadings for each of the three "hard news" items loaded on the first factor at .70 or above and no higher than .05 on the other factor. The factor accounted for 43% of the variance and (Cronbach) reliability was .81. Each of the three "soft news" items loaded on the second factor at .70 or above with no item higher than .15 on the other factor. The second factor accounted for 21% of the variance and reliability was .62. The hard and soft news items identified in the factor analysis were each combined into equally weighted scales for further analysis.

The first hypothesis maintained that newspaper use would be associated with knowledge about news events. Table 2 presents the correlations between "all" the knowledge items (the equally weighted scale of the six knowledge items that comprised "hard" and "soft" news), the "hard" news scale, and the "soft" news scale with the media use and related news media evaluation items. Since education is the most important predictor of knowledge, education is included in the table. Table 2 also includes partial correlations controlling for demographics (education, age, gender, and race)[6] and media use and evaluations.

Table 2 Goes About Here

In line with previous findings, education was by far the best predictor of knowledge. Even after controlling for all relevant variables, the correlation between education and each of the three knowledge measures was significant at $p < .01$. By contrast, when media use or evaluations yielded significant zero-order correlations, the correlations were reduced, sometimes substantially, after controlling for use and evaluations of other media and demographic variables.[7]

After controlling for all extraneous variables, the overall findings suggested support for the hypothesis that newspaper reading (and the related measure of newspaper evaluation) is correlated with knowledge of current events. Newspaper reading and evaluation were positively correlated with "hard" news. Newspaper reading, but not evaluation, was correlated with "all" news. Neither newspaper reading nor evaluation was correlated with soft news knowledge.

By comparison, none of the television news viewing measures was correlated with any of the knowledge measures; however, some of the television evaluation measures were correlated with knowledge. Local television news evaluation was negatively correlated with knowledge of all the news items and the hard news items. Network news evaluation was correlated with hard news and negatively correlated with soft news. Interestingly, overall television viewing was correlated with soft news knowledge.

It should be emphasized that while media variables were sometimes significant correlates of knowledge, they consistently accounted for small amounts of variance. As previous research suggested, education was consistently the best correlate of current events knowledge.

The second hypothesis maintained that local and network television news would each be correlated with feeling assured about news events. Table 3 presents the correlations of media use and evaluations with each of the two "assuredness" measures.

Table 3 Goes About Here

The most immediate observation from Table 3 is that after controlling for demographic variables and media use and evaluation, only local television news viewing was positively correlated with feeling as informed as needed. Education did not correlate with either assuredness measure.

Turning to prediction, the first research question asked what variables predict knowledge about news events. Table 4 individually reports the regression analyses of the three knowledge measures with the significant predictors of media use, media evaluation, demographics, and motives ($p < .001$). Since hard news and soft news were independent of each other, each was entered into the regression models as a predictor of the other.

Table 4 Goes About Here

Given that education was such a strong correlate of knowledge, it was not surprising that education emerged as the best predictor for all news items and hard news items. Interestingly, education did not emerge as a significant predictor of soft news knowledge. Regarding knowledge of all the items, two news media variables were significant predictors--newspaper reading and local television news evaluation, which was a negative predictor. The demographic variables of race and gender were negative predictors, with higher knowledge among white males. Duty also emerged as significant predictor, although it accounted for little of the variance.

Regarding hard news, newspaper reading and local television news evaluation again emerged as significant predictors, and again local television news evaluation was a negative predictor. Network television news viewing was also a significant predictor of hard news knowledge. A demographic variable, age, was a positive predictor of hard news knowledge. Once again, duty to be informed emerged as a predictor.

Interestingly, soft news knowledge emerged as a predictor of hard news knowledge, while hard news knowledge emerged as the best predictor of soft news knowledge. The two measures of news knowledge were correlated ($r=.23$, $p < .01$).

Regarding soft news knowledge, newspaper reading emerged as a predictor, making it the only media variable to emerge on all three knowledge measures. Two demographic variables, age and gender, were negative predictors of soft news knowledge, suggesting that young females were most knowledgeable.

The second research question asked what variables predict feeling assured about news events. Table 5 reports the regression analyses of the two assuredness measures with the same predictors as in the previous regression analyses.

Table 5 Goes About Here

Not much can be said of the regressions since they accounted for little of the variance. The most immediate finding is that each assuredness measure was a predictor of the other. The two variables were correlated (r=.22, p < .01). Media variables emerged in both regressions as predictors. Network news viewing was a predictor of assuredness "compared to others." Overall television viewing in minutes was the best predictor of assuredness "as need be." Regarding the "compared to others" measure, duty to be informed emerged as a predictor.

Discussion

Contrary to expectations, the findings did not suggest that respondents' assuredness of their current news knowledge was a function of media use. In line with much previous research, education was far and away the best correlate of news knowledge. It was also the best predictor of hard news knowledge. But education was not a significant predictor of soft news knowledge.

Findings regarding public familiarity and knowledge of news events appeared somewhat encouraging. That said, we should note that we entered the research aware of the chronically uninformed public and went out of our way to ask relatively easy questions.

One fruitful finding was that respondents distinguished between journalistic definitions of "hard" and "soft" news.

Further, respondents' knowledge of hard and soft news were functions of different predictor variables. Newspaper reading was the only media variable that predicted both hard and soft news knowledge. In addition, hard news knowledge was a predictor of soft news knowledge and visa versa, suggesting there might be some overall "knowledge" variable (Price & Zaller, 1993).

Turning from prediction to relationships, newspaper reading was significantly correlated with overall news knowledge and hard news knowledge. Newspaper reading was not, however, correlated with soft news knowledge. Local television news evaluation was negatively correlated with overall and hard news knowledge. Surprisingly, overall television viewing was positively correlated with soft news knowledge.

These findings suggest that types of media and types of news must be considered in studying the relationship between media use and current events knowledge. While the findings do not indicate that media use is a strong correlate or predictor of knowledge, when media use played some role in understanding knowledge it appeared that newspaper reading and evaluation were somewhat superior to other news media variables and general media use.

Although respondents' assuredness in their knowledge did not emerge as a significant variable in this study, there might yet be some value in studying assuredness. Better measures are needed to tap into what might prove to be a fruitful research route.

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TABLE 1. Familiarity and Knowledge of News Events

	Familiarity	Knowledge
Waco	98%	93%
Lozano	84	43
Baseball	83	--
Marlins	--	68%
Colorado	--	32
Health	82	55
Movie	72	43
NAFTA	56	--
Mexico	--	36
Canada	--	34

Distribution of Correctly Answered Items

Number of News Items	Percent Correctly Answered
0	4%
1	11%
2	13%
3	18%
4	12%
5	15%
6	11%
7	12%
8	5%

Table 2. Correlations of Knowledge With Controls

	Zero Order	Control: Demo	Control: Use & Eval.	Control: Demo & Use
All News Items				
Newspaper Reading	.31**	.22**	.15**	.10*
Local News Viewing	-.01	.07	-.04	.01
Net News Viewing	.11**	.11**	.06	.02
Total TV Viewing	-.04	.05	.01	.08
Newspaper Evaluation	.09	.12**	.10*	.10*
Net News Evaluation	-.05	.01	-.05	.01
Local News Eval.	-.28**	-.13**	-.17**	-.12*
Education	.41**	.38**	.38**	.34**
Hard News Items				
Newspaper Reading	.34**	.20**	.21**	.11*
Local News Viewing	.02	.05	-.04	-.02
Net News Viewing	.20**	.16**	.12*	.06
Total TV Viewing	-.11	-.01	-.08	.00
Newspaper Evaluation	.05	.09	.06	.09
Net News Evaluation	.02	.07	.03	.10*
Local News Eval.	-.21**	-.14**	-.15**	-.11*
Education	.41**	.41**	.36**	.36**
Soft News Items				
Newspaper Reading	.16**	.15**	.02	.05
Local News Viewing	-.03	.06	-.03	.05
Net News Viewing	-.04	.01	-.04	-.03
Total TV Viewing	.05	.09*	.11*	.14**
Newspaper Evaluation	.10*	.09	.11	.08
Net News Evaluation	-.11*	-.07	-.11*	-.10*
Local News Eval.	-.16**	-.07	-.14**	-.09
Education	.24**	.19**	.26**	.19**

*p<.05 **p<.01

Table 3. Correlations of "Feeling Assured" With Controls

	Zero Order	**Control** Demo	**Control** Use	**Control** Demo & Use
As Informed as Need to Be				
Newspaper Reading	-.09	-.03	-.03	-.03
Local News Viewing	.08	.07	.11*	.11*
Net News Viewing	.03	.03	-.08	-.07
Total TV Viewing	.17**	.17**	.09	.08
Newspaper Evaluation	.02	.01	-.02	-.03
Net News Evaluation	.09	.10*	.11*	.10
Local News Eval.	.15**	.13**	.06	.07
All News Items	.02	.08	.06	.07
Hard News Items	.02	.09	.06	.08
Soft News Items	.00	.03	.04	.04
Education	-.04	-.03	.03	.03
Informed Compared to Other				
Newspaper Reading	.08	.09	.08	.09
Local News Viewing	.11*	.09	.05	.06
Net News Viewing	.16**	.14**	.07	.07
Total TV Viewing	.11*	.12**	-.01	.01
Newspaper Evaluation	.01	.00	.00	-.01
Net News Evaluation	.02	.03	.01	.01
Local News Eval.	.12*	.13*	.03	.06
All News Items	.08	.08	.09	.07
Hard News Items	.09	.09	.07	.06
Soft News Items	.09	.09	.07	.06
Education	.02	.03	.10*	.09

*p<.05

Table 4. Stepwise Regressions News Knowledge*

All Items

	Beta	Multiple R	R-Squared
Education	.41	.41	.17
Newspaper reading	.23	.46	.21
Gender*	-.20	.50	.25
Duty	.15	.52	.27
Race	-.12	.54	.29
Local TV News Evaluation	-.10	.54	.30

Total R-Square = .30

Hard News

	Beta	Multiple R	R-Squared
Education	.41	.41	.17
Age	.26	.48	.23
Soft news Knowledge	.29	.55	.30
Duty	.16	.58	.34
Newspaper Reading	.13	.59	.35
Local TV News Evaluation	-.11	.60	.36
National TV News Viewing	.11	.61	.37
Race*	-.09	.61	.38

Total R-Square = .38

Soft News

	Beta	Multiple R	R-Squared
Hard News Knowledge	.31	.31	.10
Age	-.31	.43	.19
Gender*	-.17	.46	.21
Newspaper Reading	.11	.47	.22

Total R-Square = .22

* Dummy variable on race, with whites (1) and non-whites (0), so that the negative beta means whites are associated with greater news knowledge; dummy variable on gender, with males (0) and females (1) so that the negative beta means males are associated with greater knowledge than females.

Table 5. Stepwise Regressions of Assuredness

Informed Compared to Others

	Beta	**Multiple-R**	**R-Squared**
Duty	.24	.24	.06
As Need Be	.20	.31	.10
Network News Viewing	.11	.33	.11

Total R-Square = .11

As Need Be

	Beta	**Multiple-R**	**R-Squared**
Compared to Others	.22	.22	.05
TV Viewing	.15	.27	.07

Total R-Square = .07

Footnotes

1. Surveying was conducted first in English. If respondents spoke Spanish, they were switched to bilingual interviewers who interviewed the respondents from a translated survey instrument. Up to three attempts were made to call back respondents. The response rate was 79 percent. The sampling frame consisted of the residence sections (white pages) of the most recent Florida telephone directories. Pages were weighted to account for variations in type size and columns since suburban directories often had fewer listings on each page. Once a page was randomly selected, random procedures were used to select a column and then a listing from each column. After a telephone number was identified, the last digit was increased by one to permit access to unlisted numbers.

2. We chose not to use a zero mid-point on the assumption that people might cite the mid-point when they in fact held some predisposition.

3. The compound fire was on April 19, only three days before interviewing began. This might have accounted for the high familiarity and knowledge of this item.

4. The reliability measure was lower than we would have preferred with conversational utility, but this might have partly been a function of using only two questions. We realized this during questionnaire construction, but kept the number of questions at a minimum anyway because of the time constraints associated with telephone interviews.

5. In the wake of civil disturbances following the verdicts in the Rodney King case in Los Angeles, the venue for the Lozano retrial (involving the shooting of an African-American motorcyclist in Miami by a Hispanic police officer) became a prominent issue for Floridians, with the judiciary rapidly shuffling changes of venue back and forth among communities. Adam (1993) distinguishes two types of news stories: the civic, and the human interest. The Lozano story contained extensive elements of both news types, consistent with the high sharing of common variance in the factor analysis.

6. Although demographics consisted of four variables, almost all the variance was accounted for by the single variable of education.

7. Since education was one of the items that comprised the control of "demographics," when education was controlled for demographics the education item was deleted. Likewise, when each of the media use and evaluation items was controlled for media use and evaluation, the particular media use or evaluation item was deleted from the control variables.

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